

From the Desk
of the Executive Director



Tell your city's story

In an era when political organizations seem to outnumber the cars on the road, it is worth asking: who is telling your story? Are you and your municipality being recognized for the accomplishments you've achieved and the challenges you've successfully navigated? Or are you being swept into a narrative that fails to reflect reality?

One thing is certain: false narratives can spread like wildfire. Social media, outside political spending, and the dynamics of low-turnout elections can quickly amplify misleading messages and shape public perception.

Local property taxes and the services they fund provide a perfect example of how a broad-brush narrative can miss the mark. Some groups portray property tax rates as a runaway train, when the reality is often far different. Many cities have

experienced only modest increases in tax rates, some have held rates steady, and others have even reduced them.

Every municipal leader understands that major expenses such as schools, public safety, and street maintenance are essential investments. And those costs are only the beginning. Yet how often have you explained to residents and state officials how your community continues to meet rising costs and inflationary pressures while relying on only modest revenue growth?

If you do not tell that story, someone else will.

Tell your city's story. Start today.

Anthony C. Haynes

Anthony Haynes
TML Executive Director

Tennessee's aging utilities face challenges from growing technology, population base

BY KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

With Tennessee's population projected to hit 9 million by 2050 and the increased electricity needed for electric vehicles and data centers, municipalities need to be more proactive than ever when considering how new growth could affect utility demands.

Jon Sparkman, director of engineering with Tennessee American Water, and Scott Stephens, vice president of business development with SiteLogiq, discussed the future of water and electricity usage during a workshop facilitated by Warren Nevad, UT-MTAS management consultant and director of the Tennessee Renewable Energy & Economic Development Council, at the Tennessee Municipal League's annual Conference and Expo in Kingsport.

With concerns like data centers, fluctuating populations, and aging infrastructure, both Sparkman and Stephens said we are on the forefront of major changes to utilities and how they are used.

DATA CENTERS

At present, Nevad said the



TVA's Clinch River site is the proposed location of a modular nuclear reactor with TVA becoming the first utility in the nation to successfully obtain approval for an early site permit. More sites like these may become necessary to power major data centers without compromising service to existing power customers. (Photo by TVA)

state has 63 data centers, but many forthcoming data centers are expected to be a larger scale than those already in place. Tennessee as a whole consumes approximately 103 terawatt-hours (TWh) of electricity per year.

Nevad said after 15 years of usage rates remaining flat, [new reports indicate electricity use by](#)

[data centers](#) is already generating a massive surge in demand. In 25 years, the state's electricity usage rate is projected to increase 195 TWh – approximately 85%.

As we become more dependent on technology and artificial intelligence is incorporated into more systems, Stephens said he expects *See UTILITIES on Page 3*



Register Now

TML District Meetings

Districts 4, 5, & 6	9 AM (Central) Sept. 23, 2026	Brentwood
Districts 1 & 2	9 AM (Eastern) Sept. 30, 2026	Morristown
District 3	9 AM (Eastern) Oct. 8, 2026	Cleveland
District 7 & 8	9 AM (Central) Oct. 9, 2026	Jackson

NLC provides guidance on how municipalities can use new federal housing plan



The 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act is the biggest housing plan in more than 30 years and will provide multiple new incentives, grants, and tools for municipalities to address housing issues. (Photo by NLC)

BY KATE COIL

The most comprehensive federal housing plan in more than three decades, the [21st Century ROAD to Housing Act](#) provides municipalities with new incentives, grants, and supports to reduce housing costs and expand supply.

Officials with the National League of Cities (NLC) highlighted new programs put forth by the act as well as changes to existing programs – like Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) – during a recent webinar. NLC Community and Economic Development Program Director Michael Wallace and Director of Housing and Community Development Lauren Lowery provided insight into what provisions are in the act and the timeline of when new tools will become available.

NLC members and advocates worked with federal leadership on the law, which adds more flexibility for local governments in many areas. While many of these new tools will take time to implement, municipal

leaders can plan ahead and prepare to take advantage of them.

Wallace said one of the major goals of the bill is to incentivize collaboration so no municipality has to tackle housing issues alone.

“There is a deficiency of 4 million housing units across the nation that is driving up housing costs and making housing unobtainable,” he said. “The main reason NLC has been such a stalwart on this issue is because for years now, local elected officials have been coming to our meetings and conferences and asking for better tools and partnerships to address their local housing needs. Partnership is really the key to this.”

CHANGES AHEAD

Wallace said the act makes numerous small changes that can have a big impact when working together. Most of the changes are policy-focused. While the act has put in place authorization for new competitive funding programs, Wallace said NLC and city officials still have work ahead to ensure the appropriations *See HOUSING on Page 6*

Storytelling a valuable way to better engage, educate city stakeholders

By KATE COIL

With citizens constantly bombarded with information, it can be hard for municipal officials to effectively communicate and educate residents about projects, initiatives, and future goals.

Hannah Harvey, a frequent performer at Jonesborough's National Storytelling Festival, is a Blountville native with a doctorate in communication studies and performance ethnography from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. She has worked with local entities like Kingsport's Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium as well as internationally on storytelling initiatives and projects.

Harvey brought her skills to the Tennessee Municipal League's annual Conference and Expo in Kingsport to discuss the ways municipalities can better communicate their own narratives.

“Everyone in this room is a storyteller,” Harvey said. “When we tell stories in everyday life, you are engaging in world travelling. You are inviting someone into a



Dr. Hannah Harvey speaks at the TML Annual Conference and Expo in Kingsport.

world. The same neurons in your head figure as if you were actually going to that place when you hear a story about a different place.”

HOW STORYTELLING WORKS

Harvey said there are biological reasons that stories resonate. “Stories evoke emotion that im-

pacts our decision making,” Harvey said. “It taps into our adrenaline and oxytocin, which then creates a physical response. Telling a story can create empathy and trust through a symbolic communication of values.”

Whether the purpose of a *See STORY on Page 5*

Building relationships key to identifying, retaining emerging municipal leaders

By KATE COIL

As nearly half of the government workforce nationwide is expected to retire within the next four years, many municipalities are facing the task of identifying the right employees to take over leadership roles.

Dr. Brenda White Wright co-founded the East Tennessee State University's Emerging Leaders Academy and has a doctorate from the university in educational leadership. During the Tennessee Municipal League's annual Conference and Expo in Kingsport, Wright gave a workshop providing insight into how to identify, grow, and retain emerging leaders.

Wright recalled the importance of being identified as an emerging leader herself in 1983 when a community leader she admired recommended her for the inaugural class of Leadership Kingsport.

“He didn't ask me if I would like to be involved or would I like to have more information about it,” she said. “He said, ‘we're having it, and you're going to be in it.’ To which I replied, ‘yes, sir.’ Then, he told me the first meeting was next Friday at the chamber of commerce and that he was going to come, pick me up, and take me



Kingsport residents participate in Model City 101, an annual program that both educates citizens about municipal operations and helps identify residents to serve on city boards and commissions. (Photo by Kingsport)

himself because he wanted to make sure things went well for me. Be the kind of leader who not only opens doors of opportunities for others but will walk with them through them.”

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Wright said working in public service and government requires a specific leadership style: servant leadership.

“Leadership is not for everybody, and servant leadership is definitely not for everyone. People are called to be servant leaders,” Wright said. “Servant leadership is about ‘we’ and

never about ‘me.’ If you are not about making a difference in the lives of other people – making their lives better – servant leadership is not for you.”

Public service needs servant leadership rather than ego-motivated leadership.

“To be a servant leader, you have to know what is best for people and what they need,” Wright said. “You won't know that if you don't know them. You cannot build relationships with people you don't *See LEADERS on Page 5*

NEWS
ACROSS
TENNESSEE

ASHLAND CITY

Ashland City has received a \$138,300 grant from the Tennessee Department of Health that will support connectivity, accessibility, and quality of life for residents. The funds will be used to provide new amenities and enhancements at the J.W. Johns Park. Additionally, they will be used to support future sidewalk and crosswalk improvements on Jefferson, Vine, Mulberry, and Main streets, giving more accessibility to the park. The grant funds are part of the Healthier and Safer Community Initiative, which invested in projects that promote safer walking routes and greater access to community health resources like parks.

CLINTON

The state’s first-ever fusion-specific byproduct material license has been issued to Clinton’s Type One Energy in preparation for a new commercial fusion project in the area. The license is also the first issued under a first-of-its-kind regulatory framework for nuclear fusion machines put in place by Tennessee. The project is a collaboration among Type One Energy, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Tennessee Valley Authority, and University of Tennessee and will create a commercial fusion power plant using stellarator technology at the Bull Run Energy Complex in Clinton. The full startup is projected for 2034.

JACKSON

Prysmian officials announced the company will expand its Jackson operations, creating 100 new jobs and investing \$100 million to renovate and double the size of its present facility. This is the company’s second expansion in Jackson since it acquired General Cable in 2018. Prysmian expects the groundbreaking for facility improvements to begin in October with a 20-month construction schedule. Founded in the late 1800s, Prysmian has grown to become one of the world’s largest cable and fiber manufacturers. The company is headquartered in Milan, Italy, with its North American headquarters in Kentucky, and operates on six continents and in more than 50 countries.

NASHVILLE

Nashville’s Mill Ridge Park will receive \$4 million in improvements through a \$2 million grant from the National Park Service and matching funds from the Joe C. Davis Foundation. The money will be used to advance the Farm at Mill Ridge Park, a project that will create new spaces for outdoor recreation, nature education, environmental stewardship, community agriculture, and historical preservation. The plan includes restoration of several historic farm buildings and the addition of valuable green space to the fast-growing South Nashville area. The first phase of Mill Ridge Park opened to the public in August 2023 and covers 622 acres.

OAK RIDGE

The Oak Ridge Fire Department has achieved an Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification rating of 1, putting it among the nation’s highest-rated departments. ISO evaluates communities by examining factors surrounding a department’s abilities to re-

spond to fires and protect lives and property with a Class 1 the highest rank possible. The ISO evaluation process assesses the department’s capabilities, staffing, training, equipment, and emergency response as well as the community’s water supply and emergency communications systems. In addition to showcasing the department’s readiness in times of emergency, higher ratings lower fire insurance premiums for residents and businesses in the community.

ROCKFORD

Siemens Healthineers Molecular Imaging officials announced the company is expanding its manufacturing operation in Rockford. The company will invest \$43.6 million and create 90 new jobs in the next five years at the facility, which houses Siemens Healthineers Molecular Imaging’s PET Detector Center for research and development and material production. The project will enable Siemens Healthineers to boost production capacity for its PET detector technology to accommodate increasing customer demand and the launch of new PET/CT product lines. The German-based Siemens is a global provider of healthcare equipment, solutions and services, with activities in more than 180 countries and direct representation in more than 70.

ROGERSVILLE

Sam Dong officials announced the company will create 22 jobs and invest \$13.5 million to expand its operations in Rogersville. The expansion will increase the company’s production capacity of enamel and Continuously Transposed Conductors lines (CTC). Sam Dong is a world-leading manufacturer of high-quality winding wires used in transformers and utility-scale grid applications, including CTC, enameled, paper-insulated, and bare rectangular copper wire. The company holds a majority market share in North America for transformer-related winding wire products and is widely recognized by transformer manufacturers, utilities, and consultants for its advanced technology and high-quality products. Founded in 1977, Sam Dong is headquartered in Eumseong-gun, South Korea. The company established operations in Tennessee in 2007, and, following the completion of this expansion, will employ nearly 175 across Rogersville.

SPARTA

Dometic will expand its manufacturing operations in Sparta, creating more than 90 new jobs. The expansion project includes the relocation of steering and helm manufacturing operations from Pennsylvania to Tennessee, further strengthening the company’s manufacturing presence in the state. The Sparta facility manufactures marine products as part of Dometic’s global marine business. Upon completion of the project, the expansion will increase manufacturing capacity while supporting the company’s continued growth, with more than 300 people employed statewide. Headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, Dometic is a global outdoor technology company dedicated to making mobile living easy.

Lebanon cuts ribbon on downtown park renovation



Lebanon officials and community members gathered to cut the ribbon on the newly renovated Downtown Square Park. Including a green space, concert stage, and seating area, the new space allows for more events for the community and downtown merchants. Lebanon’s historic downtown square dates back to 1802 when it was formed over a local spring and in the past has hosted luminaries including Gen. George S. Patton, William Jennings Bryan, Gov. Frank G. Clement, and Sam Houston. (Photo by Lebanon)

Goodlettsville dedicates park in honor of late mayor



The family of late Goodlettsville Mayor John Coombs joined city staff and community members to dedicate the park next to Goodlettsville City Hall in his honor. Coombs was elected to the Goodlettsville City Commission in 2006 and was elected mayor by his fellow commissioners in 2012, 2014, and 2016. He also spent 39 years on the city’s planning commission, including 14 years as chairman. John Coombs Park includes covered pavilions, a walking path, and green space. (Photo by Goodlettsville)

Elizabethton opens new park funded through donation from Vietnam veteran



Elizabethton officials and local residents gathered to open a new city park made possible through donations from a late city resident. Sandra Renee Greene Park is a new 1.3-acre park with a fenced-in playground along the city’s Mill Race Linear Path and was made possible through donations from late Elizabethton resident Louie Greene. While serving with the U.S. Air Force in the Vietnam War in 1968, Greene received word that the daughter his wife was expecting – to be named Sandra Renee – was stillborn. In February 2026, Greene donated \$160,000 to the city to build and name a playground in the baby’s honor. Greene died in April but not before ordering and donating a memorial bench to also be placed at the park in the next few months. Elizabethton Parks and Recreation Director David Nanney said the park will entertain generations of Elizabethton’s children to come and stand as a testament to a father’s love. (Photo by Elizabethton)

site

logiq

Efficiency Powered by Intelligence



Tennessee's aging utlities face challenges from growing technology, population base

UTILITIES, *from Page 1*
the energy landscape to change.
“We are on the forefront of a new technology, and there are a lot of efficiencies that are there,” Stephens said. “At the end of the day, data centers are a for-profit business. They are going to run as efficiently as possible.”

Stephens said he foresees the development of mini-nuclear sites as the answer to powering data centers.

“They are going to want a system that doesn’t use as much water and power,” he said. “Those mini-nuclear plants we have all read about are coming, and that is the only way many of those data centers will work. We just don’t have the power generation to support them. They will need something they can put on their site for that.”

Sparkman said there are two main types of data centers that will impact water needs: closed-loop cooling systems where water is recirculated without evaporation, and open-loop systems that rely on water evaporation in cooling towers, often consuming hundreds of thousands of gallons of water. Smaller-scale data centers tend to run on the closed-loop system while larger ones tend to use open-loop.

While Sparkman said many companies that have approached American Water nationwide said their data centers will use between 3-5 million gallons of water a day, Sparkman said the few that have been approved actually use somewhere between 20,000 and 1 million a day.

“One of the things we are seeing is that many data centers are asking for more gallons than they need, but regardless, we want to be cognizant of our existing rate payers whenever we are making these kinds of decisions,” Sparkman said. “We have to look at source water and how much capacity we have. We have a fair amount of capacity in Chattanooga, but that isn’t true for all utilities. We also want to make sure that if infrastructure is costing the utility, the appropriate people are paying for that infrastructure.”

Another factor Sparkman said to consider is the possiblity that data centers are another “fad” that will leave utilities in the lurch if they build out their infrastructure to accommodate them.

“The other risk I see is how long that data center will be a good customer,” he said. “If you are anticipating getting your money back on volume-basis sales over the course of time, what if the technology changes? What if they don’t need that amount of water? What if you built that infrastruc-



Electricity is not the only utility that is feeling the crunch from the state's growth in population and industry. As the state's water infrastructure ages, some water utilities have consolidated to maintain service due to decreasing populations. Other utilities are struggling to both maintain existing infrastructure while providing the new infrastructure population and business growth demands. hot data centers in particular use local water resources has become a hot button issue for many communities. (Photo by Maryville)

ture, and you lose your good water customers.”

ASSET MANAGEMENT

As a lot of Tennessee’s electricity is generated through water usage and water systems are major electricity consumers, Sparkman said the two utilities are deeply connected. As a result, he said both are working to increase their efficiency as more demand is placed on their systems. One way of doing that is through proper management of assets.

“We usually do a pretty good job of knowing where our assets are,” Sparkman said. “What we don’t always have an understanding of is the status of those assets, the criticality of those assets, how those assets are being maintained, and what kind of preventative maintenance is being done on those assets. I’ve worked with small utilities where the person who knows that information is the public works director or director of engineering who keeps it in their head.”

Sparkman said a good asset management plan should include:

- Current state of assets with both an inventory and condition assessment
- Level of service
- List of critical assets
- Capital improvement plan, and
- Long-term funding plans and rate evaluations.

One of the primary services SiteLogiq offers is a program that

helps track all of a municipality’s assets from buildings down to the life cycle of a refrigerator in a community center. Stephens said cities often have a lot more assets to manage than they realize.

“You have a lot of stuff: you have buildings and items everywhere,” he said. “It’s usually the sheer volume that is the surprise. When you get everything laid out, people are shocked to find they have 30,000 different things they are managing because to them it’s just a building; they don’t think about all of the things they have within that building. The question then becomes how you develop your plan moving forward. A lot of people are doing this on spreadsheets. What we are encouraging folks to do is to get all of their assets into one place.

By knowing the age, condition, and how critical a piece of infrastructure is to the overall whole, Stephens said leaders can better budget and plan for when something may fail or needs to be replaced. The program also offers models based on population and demographics to help determine wear and tear on infrastructure as well as information on rebates, potential savings, and other offers on specific equipment.

“Our buildings are changing, and so is the amount of electricity they use,” he said. “Our electronics that we use in a modern building versus the kind we were using even 20 years ago have changed. The types of heating and plumbing systems we are using are changing.

While a building may stay in the same spot, its function and use may also change day-to-day. A long-term plan for infrastructure has to be flexible. It can help to use technology to create more efficiency for the infrastructure you need.”

Before building a new plant and looking into optimizing its efficiency, Stephens said collecting, organizing, and prioritizing data is essential.

“You have to go rooftop to the parking lot because there are so many things happening in every building in every community,” Stephens said. “You have to look at roofs, plumbing systems, HVAC, and lighting. A lot of communities have a lot more needs than they can budget for. All these systems have a certain life cycle, and at some point, you either have to go in and replace or improve those to make them more energy efficient.”

Sparkman said by implementing these plans, utilities can optimize reliable performance in the short-term, anticipate regulatory needs on the horizon, and maximize future investments.

“Ultimately, what it can do is increase the life cycle of those assets and the quality of service of those assets by more efficient use,” he said. “These plans can also give you a baseline to make decisions in a more meticulous way.”

REGIONALIZATION

Water utilities across the country are very fragmented. There are approximately 5,000 water utilities nationwide, com-

pared to 3,000 electric utilities and 1,300 gas utilities. Sparkman said he is hearing more chatter about regionalization of water services by both TDEC and the Comptroller’s Office as a means to provide better water services, particularly in areas whose populations are shrinking.

“Having a bigger entity that can do more things and manage more assets is particularly important as our workforce ages,” he said. “Having a bigger customer base also means if you need to do a big project, you have more people to spread that cost out over. A smaller utility district that needs a large project may not be able to spread that cost out, so it creates a larger impact to ratepayers.”

New regulations are another challenge regionalization can help tackle.

“In a lot of our location areas, emerging contaminants like PFAFS and lead service lines have to be navigated. One of our success stories is when the town of Whitwell decided to merge with us, and we combined that system in early 2013. We have been making improvements to their water treatment plant that has made the water quality better and more reliable. We’ve also been able to put in a new pump station.”

Sparkman said that most West Tennessee communities obtain their water from groundwater sources while that switches to surface water sources in Middle and East, which is largely impacted by rainfall. While all water systems have unique challenges and many of the systems are set up differently, Sparkman said balancing growth and maintaining infrastructure is a universal concern.

“We have areas where population growth is expected to double in the next 50 years and others that are projected to decrease about 40% in that same period,” he said. “The needs of an area that is growing rapidly are very different than those that are not. Whether the population is growing or shrinking, there is still aging infrastructure and a need to reinvest. For some, the issue will be financing that despite a shrinking customer base.”

Smart growth management will also become more essential in the future.

“The question has to be how far is our municipality planning to grow,” Sparkman said. “If I know where the edge is, I can start playing with population density and understand what we are trying to grow when we are doing master planning. If you’re building a water treatment plant, that is supposed to last for the next 30 to 50 years. Building things that are scalable is beneficial for everybody.”

No loan is too large or too small



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 \$370,00 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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PEOPLE

J. Blake Anderson, the longest-serving municipal judge in the city of Jackson’s history, died Sept. 5, 2026, at the age of 71. Anderson was first elected municipal judge for the Jackson City Court in 1996, serving until his death. A Jackson native, he earned his bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of the South in 1978 and later earned his law degree from the University of Memphis’ Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law in 1983. He served as city attorney for Three Way, defending against the city’s annexation. During his career in Jackson, he founded the city’s mental health, drug recovery, domestic violence, and environmental courts



J. Blake Anderson

Jacky Cagle, longtime East Ridge City councilmember, died Sunday, Sept. 13, 2026, at the age of 78. Cagle spent 44 years in service to the city, both on the city council and as a city employee. He joined the city’s vehicle maintenance department in 1976, working his way up to supervisor before retiring in 2010. He was then elected to the city council for the first time in 2014, remaining on the council until his death.



Jacky Cagle

Dhathri Chunduru has been selected as the new senior advisor of housing to Nashville Mayor Freddie O’Connell’s office. Chunduru will lead coordination between Nashville departments, build strategic partnerships, guide cross-sector collaboration, and remove barriers to advancing the Unified Housing Strategy. Prior to joining the city, she served as director of research and planning for the Tennessee Housing Development Agency for five years, providing strategic direction for statewide housing programs. Chunduru holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and government from Vanderbilt University, a master’s in public policy from the University of Chicago, and a doctorate in education and quantitative methods from Johns Hopkins University.



Dhathri Chunduru

Tim Dockery, longtime parks and recreation director for Newport, died unexpectedly Aug. 28, 2026, at the age of 64. A Newport native, Dockery attended the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga before taking his first role with the South Pittsburg Parks and Recreation Department. He then returned to his hometown, spending 30 years working with Newport Parks and Recreation. Over the course of his career, he saw numerous community improvements and also coached local middle school basketball.



Tim Dockery

Sherry Green, former mayor and member of the La Vergne Board of Mayor and Aldermen, died Aug. 17, 2026, at the age of 87. Green was first elected to the board in 1996, serving as an alderwoman until she was selected as vice mayor in 2000. In 2004, she was elected mayor of



Sherry Green

La Vergne and served in that role until 2006, when she returned to her seat as an alderwoman. She again served as vice mayor from 2014 until her retirement in 2018. In her 22 years of public service, Green was a strong supporter of city employees as well as senior citizens, serving on the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee.

Jamie Isabel, former Metro Nashville Councilman and business leader, died Aug. 10, 2026, at the age of 61. Isabel represented Nashville’s District 2 on the city council from 2003 to 2007 and established the Nashville City Council Black Caucus. He owned Nashville Threads, a retail shop at the Nashville International Airport that promoted custom apparel made by minority artisans since 2001. A native of Memphis, he earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Tennessee State University in 1989. He also owned and operated the Dalmatian Creative Agency, a company specializing in corporate apparel, uniforms, and public affairs.



Jamie Isabel

Steve Neilson has been named as the new planning director for Johnson City. Neilson comes to Johnson City from Morristown, where he spent the past decade as community development director. Prior to joining the city of Morristown, he served as Johnson City’s development coordinator from 1995 to 2016. He holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and public administration as well as a master’s degree in urban and regional planning from Florida State University. He also earned his master’s in city management from East Tennessee State University and received the Tennessee Distinguished Planner Award from the Tennessee Planning Leadership Council in 2012.



Steve Neilson

David Queener, Clinton City councilman and longtime police officer, died Aug. 20, 2026, at the age of 68. Queener spent more than 43 years as a member of the Clinton Police Department, serving as the agency’s first detective and ultimately retiring from the position of chief of detectives. In 2022, he was elected to the Clinton City Council representing Ward 1. His term was set to conclude Nov. 30, 2026.



David Queener

David Schreiner, former mayor and councilman for the city of Gallatin, died Aug. 6, 2026, at the age of 86. Schreiner was first elected to the Gallatin City Council in 1980 and then served as mayor from 1985 to 1989. A native of Kentucky, he graduated from Southeastern Christian College Bible Institute with a degree in biblical studies in 1962 then earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology from the University of South Florida in Tampa. He moved with his family to Gallatin in 1967 after accepting a ministry position at Gallatin Church of Christ, serving as an associate minister, youth minister, worship leader, deacon, and elder at the church. He also worked alongside church leaders to construct Christian Towers, Gallatin’s first senior living community, in 1978, and helped found what is today the Gallatin Economic Development Agency.



David Schreiner

McKinley transitions to TML's Director of Corporate Enagement and Member Benefits

Kelly McKinley will serve as the Tennessee Municipal League’s (TML) Director of Corporate Engagement and Member Benefits, transitioning to the role from her current position as Director of Digital Strategy.

McKinley began the new role on Sept. 1, 2026, and will be responsible for TML’s corporate sponsorships, educational foundation, and member benefits program. She will also take part in the execution of TML’s annual conference and expo, manage TML’s relationship with the consulting firm First Light, and provide leadership to identify and secure higher-level sponsorship opportunities.

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes said McKinley has proven herself as a problem solver, ambassador, hard worker, and a very supportive team member.

"Kelly brings a high level of energy and passion for building financial support for TML and its efforts to help Tennessee’s towns and cities," Haynes said.



Kelly McKinley

"Her background, especially in corporate customer relations, is a significant asset to advancing TML’s partnership with private companies and organizations."

McKinley said she is eager to enter this new role and continue to serve TML’s members and sponsors base.

"I have been given some incredible opportunities since joining the Tennessee Municipal League," McKinley said. "Building relationships has always been one of the most rewarding parts

of my work. Through TML, I have had the opportunity to travel across our state, spend time with municipal leaders, and work alongside organizations that share our commitment to supporting Tennessee communities."

McKinley joined the TML staff in April 2025. A native of south Georgia and a longtime resident of Gallatin, McKinley brings a strong background in digital strategy, public affairs, and nonprofit communications. Her career reflects a deep commitment to civic engagement and strategic storytelling.

Before joining TML, McKinley worked across multiple facets of government and communications, serving as Communications Director for State Senator Ferrell Haile and as Digital Director for former United Nations Ambassador Kelly Craft. She has also served on several nonprofit boards, contributed to the development of writing curriculum, and shared her insights through various online publications.

NLC honors Kluth for years of service

TML Director of Corporate Sponsorship and Conference Expo Debbie Kluth has been honored by the National League of Cities (NLC) with an award for 25 years of service.

Kluth was presented with NLC’s John G. Stutz Award for her contributions made to the advancement of municipal government through outstanding and faithful service rendered to cities and state municipal leagues.

Kluth began her tenure at TML in 1990 as a production manager and took over her current role in 1997. Her name will be added to a large plaque at NLC headquarters that contains the names of all recipients of the award since it was first bestowed in 1981.

The Stutz award is presented by NLC to individuals who have served a total of 25 years or more on the staff of a state municipal league, state league risk pool, and/or NLC.

The award is named in honor of John G. Stutz, who convened representatives of ten state municipal leagues in 1924 in Lawrence, Kan. for the first meeting



TML Director of Corporate Sponsorship and Conference Expo Debbie Kluth, left, receives NLC's John G. Stutz Award from TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, right.

of what was to become the American Municipal Association and, subsequently, the National League of Cities. At that time,

Stutz was the Executive Secretary (League Director) of the League of Kansas Municipalities.

Carrier named MTAS executive director

Angie Carrier has been named the executive director of the University of Tennessee’s Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) after serving as interim executive director since October 2025.

Carrier began her permanent role on Sept. 1, 2026.

"After conducting a search and considering several highly qualified candidates, we determined that Angie brings the broadest expertise of the three candidates to this position," said IPS Vice President Herb Byrd. "She has produced a laudable body of work over the past 10 months and had broad support among the interviewing teams. I’m excited to see the fruit of her leadership at MTAS as it continues."

Carrier has been with MTAS since 2018 when she was hired as a municipal management consultant. She later served as municipal management program manager with the organization.



Angie Carrier

"I am honored by the opportunity to serve as executive director of MTAS and to lead an organization that I care deeply about," Angie said. "I believe strongly in our mission and in the talented staff who work every day to support Tennessee municipalities. Together, we will continue to invest in our people, build meaningful partnerships, explore innovative solutions, and help local governments meet the

challenges and opportunities of the future."

Before joining MTAS, Carrier served as town administrator for Dandridge, city administrator for White House, and development services director for Johnson City.

She holds a bachelor’s degree from UT Knoxville and a master’s in city management from East Tennessee State University.

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes congratulated Carrier on her new role.

"We extend our congratulations to Angie Carrier on her selection to serve as the executive director of UT’s Municipal Technical Advisory Service," he said. "Angie understands the complex issues our towns and cities face and, with that knowledge, will be a great benefit to local officials and our state. We look forward to strengthening our historical partnership with MTAS to benefit Tennessee’s 345 municipalities."

Comptroller's office announces leadership changes

Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower has announced upcoming leadership changes in the Division of Investigations.

Director of Investigations Jeff Puckett retired Sept. 1, 2026, after more than four decades of public service. Puckett spent 34 years with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) and a decade with the comptroller’s office.

During his time at the office, he helped champion legislative initiatives, strengthened partnerships with law enforcement agencies and prosecutors, and led efforts to uncover millions of dollars in fraud, waste, and abuse.

During his time at TBI, he served as special agent in charge of the Middle Tennessee Field Division for six years and retired after 12 years after serving as the bureau’s deputy director. Puckett



Jeff Puckett

holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from Middle Tennessee State University.

Christy Tennant is the new director of investigations for the division. She most recently served as the division’s deputy director and brings more than 25 years of experience with the comptroller’s office to the role.



Christy Tennant

In that time, Tennant worked in the divisions of local government audit, state audit, and investigations. She holds a bachelor’s degree in accounting and a master’s degree in business administration with a concentration in management information systems, both from Tennessee Technological University.



Building relationships key to identifying, retaining emerging municipal leaders

LEADERS, from *Page 1*
know. Servant leaders are about making life better for people, helping people to have forward progress and improving the quality of the lives of the people they serve. When you are a servant leader, you all there to serve all the people and to make a difference in the lives of people who don't have the power you do to help them progress and not regress."

One of the best ways to build these relationships is through sharing stories that develop relatability. "The power of storytelling is that we can use it to build relationships with people," Wright said. "Storytelling is a powerful tool you can use to get to know people so you can relate to them. Through stories – no matter your racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, or generational background – you can relate through stories, particularly when you talk about families and where you live. One of the best ways we attract and retain emerging leaders is through those stories."

Wright emphasized servant leadership is demonstrated, not just talked about. "Young people are watching us," Wright said. "They are looking at you when you don't know that they are looking. They are watching to see if you are walking the walk, or are you just talking the talk. Emerging leaders are looking for role models – not perfect people – but role models who will speak truth, say the struggle is real, but come to the table because we want to hear from them."

EMERGING LEADERS

Before one can identify an emerging leader, Wright said one must first build relationships with

those around them. "Always be willing to hear a different perspective, other people's stories," she said. "As you are sharing these perspectives, listen to them through a filter of respect. If you respectfully listen to other people's perspectives then you can get to understanding even though their experience may be totally different than yours. Only then can you move to nurturing one another and growing together. There has to be ongoing communication. If you do those things, you get to trust. Trust is the foundation of every great relationship."

Wright said she finds there are three keys to empowering emerging leaders:

- Give them a voice. Ask for input before making decisions.
- Delegate meaningful decision-making power.
- Encourage open doors and open dialogues.

Rather than throwing employees into sink-or-swim scenarios, Wright said good leaders provide mentorship. "They also want to be mentored," Wright said. "They need our support. Don't just throw them in there and expect them to figure it out. They need – and want – the support of long-term, experienced leaders." Wright said having clearly outlined leadership development programs, highlighting core organi-



Providing mentorship relationships is key to identifying and retaining leaders. Wright said cities can also benefit from two-way mentorships in which individuals with different skillsets work to mentor each other. (Photo by ICMA)

zational values, establishing public visibility and organizational relationships, and promoting leadership success stories are all valuable tools to growing future leaders within any organization. Additionally, Wright said it cannot be assumed that only young employees are emerging leaders. "We also have to familiarize ourselves with our new multigenerational workforce," she said. "When we talk about emerging leaders, we aren't always talking about someone in their 20s or 30s. There are people in their 40s, 50s, or 60s who still have a lot to offer. I am in my 70s, and I'm still out here trying to serve and help."

RETAINING LEADERSHIP

For many organizations that struggle to keep younger employ-

ees, Wright said she has noticed a common issue. "Young people want to know that they can continue to grow in their lives, in their positions, and wherever they are," she said. "People in my generation, we often felt lucky to just have a job and didn't think about how far we were going to go with it. A lot of us retired from that same job. A lot of young people do not stay in jobs as some of us did, and the No. 1 reason they leave jobs is because they want to leave the leadership in those jobs. They don't leave jobs; they leave bad leaders." In her work, Wright said the biggest reason she sees why people turn down leadership opportunities is fear. She said she often breaks fear down into an acronym meaning "false expectations appearing real." "Fear, I believe, is what often

stops people from stepping up, either because they think they're not worthy or qualified, or because they were told all their lives they didn't measure up," she said. To counteract this, organizations must provide experienced mentors who are willing to build relationships with and support the growth, development, and identification of emerging leaders. Wright said one way to retain emerging leadership is to pair members of different generations together for two-way mentorship programs. "I learn literally as much from the young people I work with as they do from me," she said. "These kids have very real lived experiences that I cannot relate to. There are generational differences right in the populations you serve. You need to know about these different populations because they all have different lived experiences and all bring something different to the table. Younger people know a lot of stuff us older people don't know because of the way they grew up." Ultimately, Wright said growing and retaining leaders requires allowing them to get their hands dirty and make mistakes. "Empowerment is the cornerstone of high-value engagement and long-term employee retention," Wright said. "They want to be heard. They don't just want to hear what the decision was but be part of the decision. That is what empowerment is about: showing them that value. They need not just a seat at the table but a voice at the table, a voice that you listen to. You get better at making decisions by making decisions and learning from mistakes when you make them."

Storytelling a valuable way to better engage, educate city stakeholders

STORY, from *Page 1*
story is to recall the past or project an ideal future, Harvey said it is important to remember each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and storytellers must live "in the messy middle" of the story. Just as the beginning often represents the past and the end of a story represents its future, Harvey said the middle is representative of the present. To tell an effective story, Harvey said leaders must take listeners from what things were like in the past to the future, highlighting how the goals achieved at the end of the story can help justify the frustration being felt in the present time.

One example she used was frustration citizens might have with an ongoing road building or construction project. By evoking an image of how that project will make life easier for citizens in the future, leaders can disconnect them from the negative emotions they feel about present construction woes and instead focus on the future positives. "Stories stick with us," Harvey said. "They give us continuity and trajectory for our lives. Simple stories, when well told, can grow your community. Give them stories they want to live into."

THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING

From recruiting new businesses, to writing grants, to fostering employee collaboration, to communicating with citizens, Harvey said municipal officials engage in a wide variety of storytelling. "When you're telling your community's story, you're giving other people a story they want to live into," Harvey said. "You invite them into that story with your words and into-



The former site of Crook's Corner in Chapel Hill, N.C. Harvey highlighted how images of several local landmarks, like the restaurant, on a coffee mug were able to tell a complete, visual story about the city in a way that emotionally connected people to community values. (Photo by Wikipedia)

nations. You are painting pictures in people's minds when you tell stories. As a leader, a crucial part of your job is to tell your community's story." While people often talk in lists and bullet points, Harvey said people are more likely to remember images as they stick with them. "We are wired for visual imagery, and there is a lot of neuroscience to back that up," Harvey said. "The goal of storytelling is to get the images in your head into someone else's head. Pictures induce a more elaborate or associative encoding than ever occurs with words alone." Storytelling also engages in different types of memory, which is why people are more likely to remember the details of a story than that of a lecture. Harvey cited the storytelling used by the American

250 video "[Tennessee: The Original Frontier](#)" put out by the state, which invokes several images of the state's past and present with narration from country music legend Dolly Parton, as an example of how visual storytelling can create emotional responses. "Stories and images are linked to values that we hold dear, that are deeply set inside us," she said. "These stories and images connect us to shared values that bind us together. That video takes three minutes, but stories stick with us and lead our audiences back to the values that your community holds dear."

STORIES THAT STICK

Visual storytelling can also take many different forms. One way to begin telling stories of a community

is to add illustrations or photographs to a municipal website that connect to the municipality's values. "If you are trying to tell people 'taxes are great here' you need to show them what that looks like and tell them a story of what that concretely looks like for them," Harvey said. "Leading with pictures tells people what it feels like for the ideal future they want to live into. If there is a project you need funding for, put people on a trajectory of images that help them dive into a story." Harvey also brought with her a coffee mug she bought in Chapel Hill, N.C., which features images of several area landmarks – some of which are no longer standing. While the representation of each place is simple, she said each illustration on the mug has the power to evoke memory and a sense of place as well as communicate the area's values. The first image on the mug is of the Horace Williams House, a historic house museum on the UNC Chapel Hill campus, which Harvey said invokes community values like education, history, and preservation. The second – the Coker Arboretum – is a natural space that connects to outdoor life, fresh air, and communing with nature. The third is Franklin Street, a retail area known for its holiday celebrations that portray values like lively gatherings, creativity, and eclectic sensibility.

The restaurant Crook's Corner connects to local food culture and family farms, generational traditions, and a multicultural community. The last image is of the local retail story A Southern Season, which sells local and global items. She said this last place connects Chapel Hill to values like history, heritage, culture, global literacy, and travel.

Harvey then suggested officials visual places in their own community that evoke emotion or sense of place such as a historic landmark, a place in nature, a social scene, and a restaurant or local retail place that is iconic to the area. To begin telling a story, Harvey said you must first set a scene through visuals and sounds. "Doing that takes maybe 30 seconds, but it animates a scene that communicates all these values," she said. "Think about an important place in your community. When you go there, what does it smell like when you take a deep breath in? What does it feel like on your skin? Where is the light coming from? Are you indoors or outdoors? Is it hot, cold, damp, or itchy? Think about what you see physically in that place." By adding in people, Harvey said the story then becomes animated and provides core details people will remember. "When you put people in that scene, ask what they are doing," she said. "How are they moving in relation to one another? Are they running or sitting still? Are they standing? What is one value that scene represents for your community?" The next time leaders want to talk about a community value, Harvey said start with describing that scene and see the immediate difference it makes. "Once you take people to a place with a story, you share an experience," she said. "Once you share an experience with someone, it changes the feeling in a room, what is possible in conversation, and draws people in. Your role in these stories and scenes is holding our communities together. You make our communities possible."

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NLC provides guidance on how municipalities can use new federal housing plan

HOUSING, from Page 1
committee funds those programs.

“It offers tools, resources, and funding incentives to help local governments address their own systems they use to permit housing. It modernizes federal grant programs. It helps cities reduce internal obstacles to permitting more housing and also help address issues of buyers entering the market and their ability to gain financing. Important to us, it preserves local decision-making authority. Nothing in the bill is going to require a city to change their budget, practices, or regulations if they don’t want to.”

Other local tools strengthened by the bill include:

- Allowing new housing construction through the CDBG program for the first time.
- Expanded income eligibility and better support for workforce housing through the HOME program.
- More flexibility for housing-related infrastructure through the HOME program and new Innovation Fund.

A new requirement for using CDBG funds for housing means cities will have to create a publicly accessible database of available and developable public land in the city limits. NLC lobbied to allow a portion of CDBG funds to be set aside for this purpose.

Additionally, cities that demonstrate strong housing growth are eligible for a 10% increase in their CDBG funds. However, cities that do not demonstrate growth may see a 10% reduction in their funds. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) may come out with more guidelines about using CDBG grants for housing in the future. Other new programs authorized by the bill include:

- Regional Housing Planning Grants
- Innovation Fund
- Pattern Book Home Grants
- Whole-Home Repair Program
- Technical Assistance Resources

Regulatory changes are also on the horizon.

“The main standout that is really going to help all cities – small cities, mid-sized cities, and large cities –is it streamlines the federal environmental review process,” Wallace said. “If you are doing any project that requires federal, public dollars, you know you need to comply with NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] and other protection acts to do a review study. Oftentimes, that is accompanied by state and local requirements, and these different studies are often duplicative of each other. The bill reduces the environmental study required for specific types of housing, specifically in-fill and rural development.”

BUILDING A BIGGER TABLE

Because the subprime mortgage crisis led to many community banks closing, Wallace said there are a number of community banking provisions in the bill. As local banks are often major financial stakeholders in communities, the bill aims to incen-

SMART GROWTH PROVISIONS

IN THE ROAD TO HOUSING ACT OF 2025





Infill and missing middle housing

- Significantly eases environmental review for infill housing and certain other housing development
- Creates new innovation fund for infrastructure and initiatives that promote attainable housing



Reducing regulatory burden

- Tasks HUD with providing best practices and guidelines for state and local zoning frameworks to reduce regulatory barriers to housing production
- Supports creation of pre-reviewed building designs



Transit-oriented development

- Provides a score boost for applications for federal transit funding that include pro-housing policy
- Incorporates transit proximity and TOD into zoning best practices considerations



Climate resilience and risk preparedness

- Permanently authorizes CDBG–Disaster Recovery
- Creates Office of Disaster Management and Resiliency at HUD

Many of the provisions in the act are focused on smart growth and attainable housing for the local workforce (Infographic by Smart Growth America)

tivize localized financial institutes.

It also improves pathways for manufactured and mobile housing. Wallace said another key provision of the bill is to encourage more public-private partnerships.

“This is not a go-it-alone bill. The cities that will be able to bring their partners to the table and think about their long-term housing plans will have the most success,” he said. “No one city is going to be able to apply for every single grant opportunity in year one when they become available. We are advising cities to bring trusted community partners and leaders to the table, look at what is in the bill, decide what could work best for your community now and focus on that.”

Even though collaboration is encouraged, there is nothing that requires cities to change current laws or practices.

“We made an argument to Congress that cities are best positioned to be part of the solution when they get to use the authority they have to create more housing opportunities. We are going to be documenting what cities do. We expect to show Congress they made the right decision by giving cities new tools to make a dent in the housing supply.”

While Wallace said the bill is “not a silver bullet,” it is a first step toward producing more obtainable housing in communities across the U.S. The next step for NLC will be to advocate for funding of these programs in Congress.

Some of the new programs authorized through the act include regional housing planning grants, pattern book home grants, whole-home repair, technical assistance resources, and a new innovation fund. (Photo by NLC)

PLANNING AHEAD

To be ready for these programs when they come online, Lowery said city leaders need to follow the three P’s: plan, prepare, and partner.

“These provisions will take between 12 and 24 months,” Lowery said. “For cities to be competitive for these resources, it is going to be important that each city or community has a local housing strategy. It is important that strategy communicates the housing needs but also opportunities, barriers, and how the city will be able to tackle those issues.”

One helpful resource to making or updating such a plan is the [Housing Supply Accelerator Playbook](#):

[Solutions, Systems, Partnerships](#) released by NLC and the American Planning Association. Lowery said the guide walks leaders through a series of questions they need to answer as part of a housing strategy.

As preparation for implementation, Lowery said NLC will be engaging in continued advocacy to make cities aware of new programs and engage in federal rulemaking opportunities as they develop. She invites cities to reach out with any requests for content, resources, or tools they need to obtain new funds and flexibility.

She also encouraged leaders to begin forging the partnerships they need to move forward.

“Cities will need think about

partnering or strengthening those relationships with lenders, builders, developers, chambers of commerce, state housing agencies, economic development agencies, and planning authorities,” she said. “We need to think together about how we can utilize the resources, grants, and opportunities in the act. Cities can also leverage the resources NLC has provided.”

NLC is [providing more information](#) about the 21st Century Road to Housing Act and updates on its provision online. Local leaders can also utilize NLC’s [Filling the Gap Tool](#), which helps municipalities explore what funds and opportunities are available to them for housing.

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STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee recorded its lowest unemployment rate in two years in July 2026. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development reported a 3.4% unemployment rate, down from 3.5% in both June 2026 and year-over-year from July 2025. The last time Tennessee had an unemployment rate of 3.4% was July 2024. The U.S recorded an unemployment rate of 4.1% in July 2026. Despite the decline in the unemployment rate, Tennessee’s economy also shed 400 jobs between June and July with the biggest declines in the leisure and hospitality, retail trade, and nondurable goods manufacturing sectors. Year-over-year, the state has gained 31,300 nonfarm jobs with the largest gains in the healthcare and social assistance, administrative support, and waste services sectors.

Tennessee is one of 47 states, along with Washington, D.C., and three U.S. territories that will share in a landmark \$17.1 billion settlement with Meta Platforms, Inc., over addictive features that knowingly exposed youth users to serious mental harm and misguiding the public on its Instagram platform. Tennessee will receive more than \$751.92 million from the settlement, which will go to the state’s new Children’s Digital Protection Fund. Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti said the settlement is one of the largest consumer protection settlements in history and will require Meta to implement a sweeping set of safety features on Instagram and Facebook in the future. The settlement comes as Tennessee also wages a state-level trial against Meta in Davidson County Chancery Court.

Tennessee had the tenth fastest-growing population in the nation between 2024 and 2025, according to a new SmartAsset study. Using U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the study found Tennessee’s population increased by 0.88%, adding nearly 64,000 residents year-over-year. South Carolina was the topped rank state for growth followed by Idaho, North Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Vermont reported the least amount of growth and was one of five states where population actually decreased along with Hawaii, West Virginia, New Mexico, and California. The study also looked at the average age of state populations with Tennessee having the 14th youngest population with a median age of 39. Utah had the youngest median population with an average age of 33 while Maine had the oldest with a median age of 45.

Approximately 41% of Tennessee households struggled to afford basic needs in 2024, according to a new report on affordability in the state from the Sycamore Institute. The non-partisan public policy research center recently published the report looking on financial affordability and hardships in Tennessee and found basic needs in Tennessee cost significantly more than the federal average. While Tennessee experienced greater inflation than average national average in 2024, by and large wages in the state also grew faster than the national average. While financial hardship has declined overall for Tennesseans between 2019 and 2024, the report found that the number of households

impacted by poverty and financial hardship is more mixed with some areas of the state seeing more financial hardship than in the previous five years.

The Tennessee Department Economic and Community Development (TNECD) has announced the launch of the Tennessee Quantum Utilization Buildout Infrastructure and Technology (QUBIT) Grant Program, housed under TNECD’s Office of Innovation. The program will allocate \$43 million to support the physical and digital shared-use infrastructure and support network needed to connect Tennessee’s quantum assets and expand access to quantum technologies statewide. The projects selected will aim to strengthen regional quantum hubs, expand quantum cloud access, establish open-access testbeds and advance a coordinated statewide quantum infrastructure network. The QUBIT Grant Program is open to the following Tennessee-based eligible applicants: public or private non-profit higher education institutions, development districts, Oak Ridge National Laboratory or public utilities. These applicants may lead consortia of project partners including for-profit companies, national or regional laboratories, nonprofit organizations, utilities, educational institutions, economic development organizations and other public or private entities.

Parks and recreation grants awarded to 15 cities

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) has announced more than \$20.25 million in grant funding awarded to 19 parks and recreation projects across the state.

Grants were awarded to 15 municipalities: Bolivar, Calhoun, Dunlap, Erwin, Knoxville, McMinnville, Milan, Mount Carmel, New Market, Newport, Parsons, Savannah, Selmer, Stanton, and Sunbright.

Of the funds, \$18,490,470 were awarded through the Local Parks and Recreation Fund while \$1.76 million were awarded from the Recreational Trails Program. Additionally, TDEC’s Office of Outdoor Recreation partnered with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) to provide matching funds valued at \$6.8 million to at-risk or distressed rural communities as part of the Grant Opportunity (GO) Fund. More information about the GO Fund and how to apply for it can be found through TNECD’s Rural Development programs.

The Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF) provides state funding to match local government investments for communities for the purchase of lands for parks, natural areas, greenways, and recreation facilities.

The funds may also be used for trail development and capital projects in parks, natural areas, and greenways. This grant requires an equal match of funds. LPRF funds were awarded to Bolivar, Erwin, Knoxville, Mount Carmel, New Market, Newport, Parsons, Savannah, Selmer, and Stanton.

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federally funded,

Tennessee Historic Commission awards federal grants to five cities

Five municipalities have been awarded grants from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund to restore and conserve historic resources in their communities.

Algood, Dandridge, Loudon, Nashville, and Pittman Center all received grants for preservation projects in their communities.

Algood received \$18,000 for floor restoration at the city-owned White Plains Historic Home. Constructed in 1840 in what is now the heart of the city, White Plains and its surrounding 2.27 acres were purchased by the city in 2018 and is being developed into a museum showcasing the heritage of the local community with living history events and programs.

Dandridge received a \$66,000 grant for roof and masonry restoration at the Hickman Tavern and Hickman Tavern Coach Home. Constructed in 1820, the structures now serve as Dandridge Town Hall and the Dandridge Visitors Center. Both buildings were once important stops on early stagecoach routes between Knoxville and Abingdon, Va.

Loudon received \$36,000 for the preparation of updated historic design and review guidelines for the city.

Nashville received \$51,600 for an architectural survey of the north, south, and southeastern portions of the city.

Pittman Center received \$66,000 for the restoration of the Community Center Home Eco-



The city of Algood purchased the historic home White Plains, pictured here, in 2018 with the aim of preserving it for a museum and cultural center. The city is one of five to have received a grant from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund as part of various projects across the state. (Photo by Algood)

nomics Building. The only remaining structure from the Methodist settlement school established in the community in the 1920s, the building now serves as Pittman Center Town Hall.

Additional grants will assist in funding preservation planners in seven of the state’s development districts, including the East Tennessee, First Tennessee, Northwest Tennessee, South Central Tennessee, Southeast Tennessee, Southwest Tennessee, and Upper Cumberland development districts. These positions can aid communities in historic preserva-

tion work. The grants were a part of a total of \$1.1 million in matching grants awarded to 28 total projects by the Tennessee Historical Commission and the State Historic Preservation Office. Each grantee must provide a 40% match to awarded grant funds.

All properties receiving grants must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A new grant cycle for the Federal Historic Preservation Fund will open in January 2027 with applications available online.

Municipality	Grant Type	Amount	Project Description
Bolivar	LPRF and GO Fund	\$3.5 million	Indoor pool development at Bolivar Community Center
Calhoun	RTP	\$490,000	Blueway enhancement and trail project
Dunlap	RTP and Go Fund	\$525,000	Dunlap Pump Track Park
Erwin	LPRF and GO Fund	\$392,000	Erwin River Landing
Knoxville	LPRF	\$746,730	Tennessee RiverLine McWherter Park and Suttree Landing Park improvements
Knoxville	RTP	\$400,000	Holston River Park Bike Skills Course
McMinnville	RTP	\$100,000	Bigbee River Trail and Linear Parks connectivity improvements
Milan	RTP	\$391,092	McKellar Park restrooms
Mount Carmel	LPRF and GO Fund	\$1.5 million	Mount Carmel Park sports areas and splash pad
New Market	LPRF	\$1,046,225	New Market playground and Archery Center project
Newport	LPRF and GO Fund	\$3.5 million	Woodland Phase 1 and White Oak Redevelopment
Parsons	LPRF and GO Fund	\$396,750	Parsons Memorial Park project
Savannah	LPRF and GO Fund	\$2,759,568	Savannah Sportsplex improvements
Selmer	LPRF and GO Fund	\$450,000	Selmer City Park pool renovation and replacement
Stanton	LPRF and GO Fund	\$562,446	New city park development
Sunbright	RTP	\$92,000	Sunbright City Park recreational trail development

state administered grant program that provides grant funding for land acquisition for trails, non-routine trail maintenance, trail construction, trail rehabilitation, and for trail head support facilities.

The funds are distributed in the form of an 80% grant with a 20%

match based on the total project amount. RTP funds were awarded to Calhoun, Dunlap, Knoxville, McMinnville, Milan, and Sunbright.

In addition to the 15 municipalities receiving awards, grants were also given to Decatur, Hay-

wood, and Unicoi counties. More information about the LPRF and RTP programs, other grants, and upcoming grant application deadlines are available on the TDEC Office of Outdoor Recreation website.

Tennessee state budget \$418.2M above estimates for July 2026

Tennessee revenues exceeded budgeted estimates for the month of July with Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reporting total July tax revenues were \$2.2 billion, \$418.2 million more than the budgeted estimate and \$337.8 million more than July 2025.

The total tax growth rate for the month was 18.39%. General fund revenues were \$404.8 million more than the July estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$13.4 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, July is the final month in the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Final reported revenues will be subject to accrual accounting adjustments that may increase or decrease the recorded cash amounts on an audited basis.

“July delivered a strong revenue performance,” Bryson said.

“Better-than-expected sales tax growth, reflecting strong June consumer activity, and significant franchise and excise tax collections, drove higher revenue collections. Other taxes were near or above expectations. Tennessee will close fiscal year 2025-2026 significantly ahead of expectations, primarily due to a 13% revenue growth in the fourth quarter. While we are pleased to finish the fiscal year on such a strong note, it is important to remain cautious for the future. Some growth resulted from inflation, and F&E taxes vary significantly month to month. These corporate estimated payments may require adjustments once final tax liabilities are assessed. Therefore, we will continue to closely monitor economic conditions and manage the state’s finances responsibly.”

On a year-to-date basis, August through July, total tax reve-

nues are 5.24% greater than the budget estimate, or \$1.2 billion above expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have grown 7.65% or \$1.7 billion.

General fund revenues are 5.91% greater than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$1.1 billion higher. Likewise, general fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased 7.65% or \$1.4 billion.

Individual tax performance compared to July 2026 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 5.28% or \$69.2 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 286.94% or \$335.8 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimates by 4.08% or \$4.5 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 3.93% or \$8.6 million

Year-to-date performance compared to Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 2.13% or \$320.3 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 19.29% or \$757.0 million
- Fuel Taxes: Below estimates by 0.11% or \$1.5 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 4.51% or \$106.6 million

Individual tax performance compared to July 2025:

- Sales Taxes: Up 8.52% or \$108.3 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 82.64% or \$204.9 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 5.92% or \$6.4 million
- All other taxes: Up 8.68% or \$18.1 million

Individual tax performance

compared to August 2024 through July 2025:

- Sales Taxes: Up 4.57% or \$670.0 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 22.09% or \$846.7 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 0.01% or \$0.1 million
- All other taxes: Up 7.53% or \$172.8 million

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

These estimates also incorporate any revenue changes enacted during the 2025 General Assembly session. Monthly estimates for fiscal year 2025–2026 are available on the state’s website.

Goodlettsville's Ellis discusses career, future of city management

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

After nearly 40 years of service in local government, Goodlettsville City Manager Tim Ellis will retire Sept. 30, 2026.

Ellis caps off his distinguished career in public service after 15 years as city manager of Goodlettsville. During his tenure, the city’s bond rating has improved to AA2, city revenues from local options sales tax increased 46% over five years, and numerous parks and public infrastructure projects were completed.

Ellis also saw the city earn a Level 1 Award for Workplace Efficiencies from the Tennessee Center for Performance of Excellence, along with the successful acquisition and administration of \$50 million in grant funding.

In addition to serving as city manager since 2011, he spent four years as Goodlettsville’s assistant city manager and three years as the city’s director of parks, recreation, and tourism.

Prior to coming to Goodlettsville in 2003, Ellis spent more than 14 years as director of parks, recreation, and cultural arts for the city of White House and nearly three years as recreation supervisor for the city of Springfield.

Ellis has also served as a past president and board member of the Tennessee City Management Association (TCMA) and on the boards of the Tennessee Municipal League, Forward Sumner Economic Partnership, and USDA’s Land Between the Lakes Advisory Board. He has also been a trustee of the state’s Consolidated Retirement System Board.

He was selected as the TCMA City Manager of the Year in 2017. Ellis is an ICMA-credentialed manager through the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and a certified public manager through the University of Tennessee’s Institute of Public Service.

TT&C: You began your career in parks and recreation. How did you transition from that to city management?

Tim Ellis: My grandfather was in public service for 32 years. My dad was in public service for 37 years. I had always been around some element of public service. Toward the midpoint in my career, I had discovered that everything was becoming the same thing every day to me, and I would like to learn more. I really wasn’t going to be able to achieve that in the parks and recreation field. Most of what I was doing in parks and recreation was really on the side of capital projects and development of recreational services.

When the opportunity for assistant city manager in Goodlettsville came about, I was appointed to that position, and it allowed me to grow further. At that point, I had about 22 years in local government. I had seen it all, but not really done it all. I took that opportunity, and it allowed me to once again grow and learn.

TT&C: What do you think has been the biggest change to how cities are managed in the course of your career?

TE: In 15 years as city manager, the culture we are living in has changed. The demand for services with less and less money is extremely prevalent. People want everything, but they want what they pay to stay the same.

The second part of that is the political and civic mindsets of communities, elected officials, and even government employees have changed. There are some people who think everything has to be an argument for anything to get achieved, rather than just sitting down, figuring out what needs to be done, and planning how to get there.

TT&C: Goodlettsville is one of a handful of Tennessee municipalities that is located in more than one county. What unique challenges and opportunities does this present?

TE: We are not just in two counties, we are the only municipality in the U.S. that is in two counties where one of those counties is a metropolitan form of government. That is really unheard of. It presents great opportunities, because you can feed off of each county government somewhat. It’s unique in that there are differences in each county.

We haven’t been able to annex territory in Davidson County since 1963, which no one really thought would be a problem. When they built the RiverGate Mall, however, they built it right across the city limits. Some of the building was in Goodlettsville and some was not. We also have some homes built across city limit lines. However, we collect a lot of money on visitors to Nashville. Coming out of a branding plan that was recently done, Goodlettsville is the front door to Nashville. If you are coming from the north, you have to come through Goodlettsville to get to Nashville. We try to capitalize on that.

TT&C: Like much of Middle Tennessee, Goodlettsville has experienced a great deal of growth in your tenure with the city. How do you manage balancing the desire for growth with maintaining community identity?

TE: We have not grown as rapidly as some of the other communities, because we really want smart growth. One of our challenges is that a lot of our community is either on a hillside or in a floodplain, but we have managed growth. We recently pushed the pause button to reinvent our comprehensive land use plan to make sure that as Goodlettsville grows it is



Ellis and members of his team at Goodlettsville City Hall. Ellis has spent 15 years as Goodlettsville's city manager but has more than 40 years of municipal service. He credits his team at the city of Goodlettsville with helping the city achieve many notable accomplishments, including improvements on its bond rating, increase in sales tax revenues, and new parks and infrastructure projects. (Photo by Goodlettsville)



Goodlettsville City Manager Tim Ellis

growing in a manner our residents want to see it grow, not what the world around us wants. That is one of the things a lot of communities fall prey to: that they feel pressure from what is going on in the world around them. They think ‘we have to match this’ or ‘we have to match that.’ Really and truly, it is matching what your constituents envision their community to be.

One example is the RiverGate Mall redevelopment. In seeking all that out and working through all the components with a suitable developer, working through the public finance piece of it, and making sure that met up with what we wanted for our comprehensive public plan. That is a high-quality, mixed-used development with a blend of commercial, office, residential, and entertainment. This was truly a partnership between Metro Nashville and the city of Goodlettsville because, at the end of the day, all of it’s in Davidson County, but a large portion of it is in the city of Goodlettsville.

A lot of what we are seeing in Goodlettsville is either new development or redevelopment. Going from one city to the other, we have about 210,000 cars a day. If you have that many people driving through your city, a certain portion are going to eat, stop, and stay. That is something we try to capitalize on-- our hospitality industry.

TT&C: Because of its proximity to Nashville, Goodlettsville deals with congestion and traffic issues similar to much larger cities. How do you approach balancing projects the city may need – like road improvements – versus other projects that may seem more eye-catching to the public?

TE: You have to anticipate what is happening currently and what will happen long term. If you are anywhere in the Nashville region and traffic isn’t at the top of your priority list, I’d like to come visit your town. We have about \$10 million in grants for traffic synchronization grants in our city. That is one of the things we have been blessed with-- we can utilize a lot of grant funding.

Our Main Street corridor is in the process of being redeveloped. It will have bright eight-foot sidewalks, decorative lighting, and landscaping. And no one will ever notice that synchronization and traffic flow will improve as well. One of the other parts of this is you have your general operations, your public safety, streets, and highways, and parks budgets, but the normal resident doesn’t understand that. Utilities are a whole different part of the operations with their own funding. Public education in how government works is kind of paramount because there is a total lack of understanding in that regard.

TT&C: What would you categorize as the biggest challenge you have faced in your career, and how did you tackle that?

TE: There have been a few, and not all of them have had just me solving them. It has been community centric. When I was at White House, as a community we approved impact fees and a sales tax referendum solely for parks and recreation. That has allowed them, as growth has occurred, to really stay ahead of the curve when it comes to financing.

From the city manager side of things, we’ve talked about a lot of funding for many of these projects. How we achieved that is no longer just submitting grant applications;



Ellis, far right, celebrates Goodlettsville earning the Level 1 Award at the 2026 Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence ceremony with the city's team. (Photo by Goodlettsville)

we made sure we submitted great grant applications. Because we took the extra effort, utilized teams, or even in some cases outside sources, we have been very successful in attaining those grants for many different things from buying fire equipment to building roads, traffic signals, park facilities, splash pads, accessible playgrounds, and our Main Street project. From a city manager side of things, when you look at what you want to do and forecast your revenue and so forth, how we have been able to achieve a lot of that is through external funding that isn’t really costing the city that much.

TT&C: What would you say is your biggest accomplishment as a city manager?

TE: The two that will be the biggest accomplishments will be that \$20 million Main Street Project, the RiverGate redevelopment – which has been huge – and the growth in our public safety. The growth in our park system is also great. When I leave, we will have added four new parks to our system.

TT&C: What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?

TE: Even on your worst day, when you see a resident is excited about living here, excited about the services we provide, you see their children playing on the playground, or them talking a police officer, your day has been made. Even though in public management you are really looking at numbers and how to achieve or provide the greatest services possible, there is always that feeling of reward when you see people enjoying the work you and others have done to maintain that for them.

TT&C: What, in your opinion, makes a good city manager and why?

TE: They need to be a life-long learner. The world is changing around us, and you have to adapt to that. The other part is someone who has a well-rounded experience. I feel like coming from the parks and recreation side allowed me to be more accustomed to the different parts of a city. They really need to be able to learn how and why we do things. The third thing is to develop great friendships and mentorships that allow you to have a person or two or four or five you can reference and go back to. I think that’s one of the things in my career, besides my family’s experience of public service, is the fact that I have had great people that I have worked for, worked with, and have been associated with that I feel are great friends and, in many cases, great mentors to me.

TT&C: How do you advise city managers approach identifying, growing, and retaining public servants and the next generation of municipal leaders?

TE: Identifying talent can be one of the hardest things there is. You can’t just identify the talent; you have to help them grow. Identify the resources they need to learn. If they want to really achieve success, you will see them take advantage of everything you lay out for them to grow. Don’t be dependent on a third party to help these people grow. Be that mentor to that person. Be able to ask them how they think things went. Never say “I’m not sure that worked out the right way.” Instead, ask “do you think that worked out how you felt like it should?” and let them critique themselves.

TT&C: What do you think will the biggest challenge for the next generation of city management professionals? What advice do you have for them?

TE: The biggest challenge I see is we have got to do a better job of engaging the younger generation about public service and what public service truly means. In a lot of cases, there is this false idea they are just working for the city. If they are going to be successful, they are really a public servant, which comes with a certain level of expectation. We have to help them along. If they don’t have a mentor and you’re not the right person to be that mentor, help them get aligned with someone in the area they want to work in who will take the time and walk through that.

One of the greatest issues right now, to me, is the total lack of civility and statesmanship in carrying out the operations of governance. The saddest part of that is the younger generation is seeing it as the norm. They think they have to act like that to achieve anything. While most of that is in the political environment, it does bleed over. The younger generation needs to realize it has to operate with a certain level of ability and working together. From everything everybody sees in the world, cooperation seems non-existent. We need more practicum and internship hours so, not only are these folks graduating with a degree, they have a certain level of field knowledge of what government looks like. Otherwise, they don’t have a clue what they’re getting into.

ICMA and TCMA all have codes of ethics they require you to follow. One thing I would encourage everyone to do is go by ethics, use your ethical barometer to do the right things for the right reasons, and no matter what, do not let that change. I also encourage city managers to reach out to their counterparts and make sure they’re OK. They may be having a hard time or facing a tough situation in their city. They may not be able to talk about it, but it can mean a lot to them to have someone call and check on them. Everyone goes through those times, and taking care of your fellow local government officials is important.

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