

Mayor's State of the City and Budget Address
Lane Curlee, Mayor
June 5, 2017

To the Board of Aldermen and the citizens of Tullahoma. For the 15th time I present a Budget Message and State of the City to you as Mayor. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the economic vitality of Tullahoma as well as some of the achievements that have shaped our community the past year. I also will highlight some initiatives we have to look forward to in the coming year.

I am pleased to report the City government enjoys an Aa2 Bond rating, one of the highest in the state for a community our size. The City government once again had no audit findings. Your city government earned the GFOA Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Management, as well as the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, one of the few cities in Tennessee to have that distinction. These are independent and objective measures of how your tax monies are managed and measured for financial soundness. This budget represents a fiscally conservative approach to manage the monetary affairs of city government. I appreciate the leadership of City Administrator Jody Baltz and Finance Director Sue Wilson for their professional approach in managing the fiscal affairs of city government. I also appreciate all Department Heads for their leadership and management of the day-to-day affairs in their departments.

Now, to the budget before you. This budget represents our best effort at preserving, managing and building the assets of Tullahoma....whether these are people, buildings or programs. I welcome the Boards' and citizens' suggestions and offers of improvements. The budget as proposed contains no property tax increase for the next fiscal year and is balanced. It also assumes no additional personnel.

This budget does not appropriate additional monies for Tullahoma City Schools. However, the school system will benefit from additional projected sales tax revenue for their General Fund and Sales Tax Sinking Fund accounts. This fiscal year, city government will continue to provide \$600,000 in loan payments for the THS facility improvements and East Lincoln School. We must challenge our School Board, Administration, teachers, staff and students to continue their excellent work within the financial constraints provided.

The departments of city government made requests to improve or enhance services that will not be funded. Thanks to excellent financial stewardship, total operating expenditures are up less than 1%. I am pleased there is a 2% cost of living raise for all full-time city government employees as well as a step raise. Also included is the city's share of the Duck River Electric Substation in the Joint Industrial Park.

Thanks to a combination of factors – all good – the city government is in a position to secure a \$5 million loan for several long-needed infrastructure projects to benefit the citizens of Tullahoma. These factors include moving the Lighttube debt off the city books, strong increases in retail sales and new construction and efficient stewardship of city government expenses.

I propose we use this \$5 million loan to build a new police station and animal shelter, plus significant additions in permanent paving, new sidewalk construction and park improvements. First year debt service for the loan is included in this budget.

The men and women of the Tullahoma Police Department have been using the existing station 24/7 since 1955. The building has not had a serious renovation in many years. It is old, outdated and severely lacking in basic policing needs. In 1955 there were 12 officers, currently there are 37 officers. There is no suitable interview or interrogation room or storage for equipment, weapons, and information technology. Alleged suspects (adult and juvenile) are often seated in open areas visible to the public and alleged suspects are often seated in areas where armed officers are moving around and police operations are discussed. The current facility has mechanical and electrical issues that are extremely difficult to repair due to the age of the facility and construction. Plus, the electrical and technology needs have far outdated the capabilities of the building without extensive installation and repair. These monies will construct a new station on West Grundy Street land being donated by great community partners, Fran and Dan Marcum. This station will serve the policing needs of Tullahoma for many years and will be a facility of which we can all be proud.

The current Animal Shelter was built in the 1980s. It is old and outdated. The small and dedicated staff and volunteers do an excellent job with the resources they have. It is time we build a new shelter and continue their good work. Last fiscal year our no-kill shelter adopted out 173 dogs – an amazing number for a community our size. Thanks to the hard work of staff and volunteers raising money, and the very generous donations of benefactors, the cost of the shelter will be considerably less.

Ever since I can remember we have appropriated \$250,000 annually for permanent street paving. We need to do more to maintain 330 miles of roads in Tullahoma. A drive down many streets will confirm work needs to be done. Paving will be done in all four quadrants of Tullahoma. I propose we double the amount of street paving typically done each year.

By far the biggest request I receive from citizens is for sidewalks. It seems everyone loves sidewalks. And for good reasons. Sidewalks encourage neighbor interaction, fitness, and safety. Emphasis should be placed on adding sidewalks nearest schools and to connect existing sidewalks.

This is also an opportunity to better develop our parks. My goal is for 90% of Tullahoma homes to be within one half mile of a park, fitness trail or equipment. The loan includes money to start developing our new East Lincoln Street Park as well as make improvements to Waggoner Park and the park beside East Lincoln Elementary School.

Thanks to the help of many, Tullahoma has accomplished much in the past year and have much to look forward to this next fiscal year. The Go Green! Tullahoma initiative works to increase recycling and energy efficiency. At Tullahoma Utility Authority's suggestion, all street lights will convert to LED lighting within the year, saving energy, maintenance and resources. The Get Fit! Tullahoma initiative has seen much success as well. The Walk to the Beach and Walk Across Tennessee by Parks and Rec were very successful and we will soon see extensions to our greenway system. Splash Island and the renovated Joe Moon Weight Room and other fitness initiatives stress health and fitness. Public Works and Planning and Codes have developed a comprehensive Clean Up! Tullahoma campaign that not only stresses roadside litter pickup, but the clearing of dilapidated structures as well. I am convinced people want to live in clean communities and I'm confident people want to invest in clean and attractive communities. The Arts Council is working hard to position Tullahoma as an arts destination. They recently completed a first-time, successful Downtown Art Crawl and have more art-centered activities to come.

This year, I want to focus on tourism. Tourism is the second largest industry in Tennessee and Tennessee recently cracked the top 10 states in tourism spending. We do a pretty good job attracting tourists, without even really trying, but I know we can do better with a focused, strategic effort. I suggest we not just think locally, but regionally, and develop partnerships within our five county area to better attract and retain tourists. I have included a modest amount of money in this budget to implement tourist-generating campaigns. I believe this small investment will pay big dividends.

Other good news in the city this past year: TAEDC secured a \$280,000 site development grant to improve the new Business Air Park as well as develop a new 8-page brochure to market the site. Over 95% of Tullahoma citizens are employed, 169 business licenses were issued, retail sales and new home starts are up. Tullahoma High School's ACT scores exceed both state and national averages, with our school system one of the top 10 school districts in the state, and our Board of Education was recognized as a Tennessee Board of Distinction. Students led middle Tennessee in top ten math winners in regional competition and two of the three Tullahoma Teachers of the Year were named regional winners. TUA successfully transitioned to an Authority and refinanced electric fiber debts with interest rates reducing from 4.25% to 1.99%, the TVA wastewater treatment facility earned a \$102,000 energy efficiency grant and TVA received the "Excellence in Water Treatment Operations Award". The Tullahoma Regional Airport earned the Tennessee Aeronautics Commission's Airport of the Year award, sold an all-time record of fuel, and completed over \$1 million in improvements. Your city government completed \$375,000 in low-income housing repairs, Gov. Haslam once again named Tullahoma as a Healthier Tennessee Community and the Finance Department earned national awards for distinguished budgeting and financial reporting. The city's building codes are being upgraded. The Police Department has collected over one ton of prescription medicine in the Drug Take-Back program. The Fire Department installed over 2,000 free smoke detectors. The Downtown Renovation project was completed and Public Works' recycling program collected over 6,000 tons, saving nearly \$300,000 in disposal fees. Parks and Rec installed new fitness and playground equipment at Imagination Station, Waggoner Park and East Park, and introduced a very successful regional Independence Day Celebration. The Tullahoma micropolitan area is now ranked 18th in the country. We earned the Tree City designation for the 20th year in a row. Oh, and we had an inspired recovery from an EF-1 tornado.

Our chief job as Mayor and Aldermen is to define our vision and inspire the community to help reach the vision. It is critical we keep our eyes on our bold vision for Tullahoma to be considered world class in everything we do. From job creation, to cleanliness, to high school graduation rates and everything in-between, I want Tullahoma to be the best and considered a world-class community.

There appears to be a great deal of confidence in Tullahoma, both from citizens already here and from outsiders looking to invest here. And many more exciting things are on the drawing board. By growing Tullahoma, diverse jobs will be created from entry level to the professional level.

Much of the positive actions I have presented are by the city government and affiliated agencies. There are countless acts of good will that quietly happen every day by Tullahoma citizens, businesses, churches and organizations that truly make a positive difference in the lives of all Tullahomans. Thanks everyone for all you do to make Tullahoma a great place to work, live, play and raise our families.

We should all be challenged by three thoughts:

- 1) "Great cities are intentional, not accidental." In other words, we must have a plan and take strategic steps to accomplish our plan
- 2) "Why can't Tullahoma be the best?" Some city is going to be the best.....why not Tullahoma? We should always strive to be the best in everything we do.
- 3) "If you really love Tullahoma, you have to help make Tullahoma better." We all have opportunities to improve Tullahoma, whether through your school, job, civic club, church, neighborhood, or household. Get involved. Make a difference. Leave Tullahoma better than when you found it.

In summary, Tullahoma is truly a blessed community. We have so much to be thankful for and so much to look forward to. While it truly is a great day to be in Tullahoma, let's always remember we can make a great community even greater. Let's leave Tullahoma better than we found it by the work we do and the decisions we make.

Lane Curlee, Mayor

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