

**HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 21, 2026**

STATE OF TENNESSEE) Regular Meeting

COUNTY OF HAMILTON) January 21, 2026

BE IT REMEMBERED that on this 21st day of January 2026 at 4:00 PM, a Regular Meeting of the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners was begun and held at the Courthouse in the City of Chattanooga, in the County Commission Room, when the following proceedings were held, to wit: --

0:15

Present and presiding was the Honorable Ken Smith, Chairman. Chief Deputy County Clerk Brooke Weaver called the roll of the County Commission, and the following, constituting a quorum, answered to their names: Commissioner Chip Baker, Commissioner Greg Beck, Commissioner Mike Chauncey, Commissioner Jeff Eversole, Commissioner Joe Graham, Commissioner Lee Helton, Commissioner Steve Highlander, Commissioner Warren Mackey, Commissioner David Sharpe, Commissioner Gene-O Shipley, and Chairman Ken Smith. Total present – 11. Total absent – 0.

Also in attendance were County Mayor Weston Wamp, members of his administrative staff, and County Attorney Janie Varnell.

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Attached hereto is a copy of the Public Notice for this meeting, which was published in a local newspaper and made a matter of record of this meeting.

0:38 Commissioner Chauncey invited Commissioner Highlander to offer the invocation. Commissioner Chauncey led the pledge to the flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1:34 **ON MOTION** of Commissioner Baker, seconded by Commissioner Shipley, that the minutes of the Agenda/Regular Meeting of January 7, 2026, be approved, treated the same as read, made a matter of record, and filed. The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

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PROCUREMENT PURCHASE ORDERS REPORT

Procurement's reports detailing purchase orders between \$20k and \$50k for December 2025 were submitted and made a matter of record.

**RESOLUTION NO. 126-19 A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AND ACCEPT
APPLICATIONS FOR NOTARY PUBLIC POSITIONS, THE BONDS AND OATHS OF
NOTARIES PREVIOUSLY ELECTED, AND THE OATHS OF DEPUTY SHERIFFS.**

ON MOTION of Commissioner Baker, seconded by Commissioner Highlander, to adopt Resolution No. 126-19.

There were no questions from the Commissioners or the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith,

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“Aye.” Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total “Aye” votes – 11. Total “Nay” votes – 0.

Without objection, Chairman Smith asked for Resolution Nos. 126-27 and 126-28 to be read together.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-27 A RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO SALE CREEK HIGH SCHOOL IN THE AMOUNT OF EIGHT HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$800.00) FROM GENERAL FUND TRAVEL DISCRETIONARY MONIES, AS ALLOTTED TO DISTRICT ONE.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-28 A RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO SODDY DAISY TROJAN FUND IN THE AMOUNT OF FOUR THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$4,500.00) FROM GENERAL FUND TRAVEL DISCRETIONARY MONIES, AS ALLOTTED TO DISTRICT ONE.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Highlander, seconded by Commissioner Beck, to adopt Resolution Nos. 126-27 and 126-28.

There were no questions from the Commissioners or the audience.

2:50

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The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-20 A RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY TO APPLY AND ACCEPT THE 2025 HOMELAND SECURITY GRANT WITH THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND THE TENNESSEE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY IN THE AMOUNT OF \$197,676.95.

Commissioner Eversole, Chairman of the Finance and Budget Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-20 and stated the Finance and Budget Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

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ON MOTION of Commissioner Eversole, seconded by Commissioner Baker, to adopt Resolution No. 126-20.

There were no questions from the Commissioners or the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-21 A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$500,000.00 OF AWARDED CDBG-CV FOOD INSECURITY GRANT FUNDS FOR THE PURCHASE OF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES FOR LOCAL FOOD BANK PARTNERS, AND AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY MAYOR TO SIGN ANY CONTRACTS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THIS RESOLUTION.

4:37

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Commissioner Eversole, Chairman of the Finance and Budget Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-21 and stated the Finance and Budget Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Eversole, seconded by Commissioner Graham, to adopt Resolution No. 126-21.

There were no questions from the Commissioners or the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

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5:22 **RESOLUTION NO. 126-22 A RESOLUTION TO ALLOCATE AN AMOUNT UP TO
\$750,000 FROM THE HOTEL MOTEL FUND FROM THE FISCAL YEAR 2026
BUDGET TO SUPPORT SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED PROJECTS.**

Commissioner Eversole, Chairman of the Finance and Budget Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-22 and stated the Finance and Budget Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Graham, seconded by Commissioner Shipley, to adopt Resolution No. 126-22.

6:07 In response to Commissioner Mackey's question, Mayor Wamp stated the resolution identifies three specific projects: an air service recruitment initiative administered through the Chamber Foundation, a downtown retail recruitment program, and a splash pad project in Lookout Valley.

There were no questions from the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows:

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Commissioner Baker, “Aye,” Commissioner Beck, “Aye,” Commissioner Chauncey, “Aye,” Commissioner Eversole, “Aye,” Commissioner Graham, “Aye,” Commissioner Helton, “Aye,” Commissioner Highlander, “Aye,” Commissioner Mackey, “Aye,” Commissioner Sharpe, “Aye,” Commissioner Shipley, “Aye,” and Chairman Smith, “Aye.” Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total “Aye” votes – 11. Total “Nay” votes – 0.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-23 A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$350,000.00 FOR SPLASH PAD EQUIPMENT AT JOHN A. PATTEN COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE HAMILTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT, AND AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY MAYOR TO SIGN ANY CONTRACTS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THIS RESOLUTION.

Commissioner Eversole, Chairman of the Finance and Budget Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-23 and stated the Finance and Budget Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Graham, seconded by Commissioner Shipley, to adopt Resolution No. 126-23.

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8:34 In response to Commissioner Sharpe's question, Mayor Wamp stated Tennessee law requires Hotel Motel funds to be used for tourism-related purposes and explained the County prioritizes projects that benefit both tourism and local residents.

12:10 In response to Commissioner Sharpe's question, Assistant Financial Administrator Vonda Patrick stated the prior Hotel Motel Fund expenditures have been submitted to and approved by the Comptroller's Office.

12:12 Commissioner Sharpe expressed support for the resolution, while noting the importance of monitoring the use of hotel motel funds.

12:56 Commissioner Mackey spoke in support of the proposed allocation of Hotel Motel funds, citing past youth programs at Central High School and the Harrison ballfields as successful in keeping children engaged and reducing juvenile delinquency. He noted such investments provide long-term community benefits and encouraged the Commission to support the resolution.

At this time, several Commissioners spoke in support of the proposed allocation of Hotel Motel funds.

13:38 In response to Chairman Smith's question, Hamilton County Director of Parks and Recreation Matt Folz stated the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the

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City has been drafted, and City officials have indicated agreement with the language, confirming the MOU is ready to move forward for the project.

There were no questions from the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

RESOLUTION NO. 126-24 A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE LOAN AGREEMENT FOR THE ISSUANCE OF DEBT BY HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOLS FOR AN ENERGY EFFICIENT SCHOOLS INITIATIVE AND AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF THE LOAN AGREEMENT IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED FIVE MILLION DOLLARS (\$5,000,000).

17:16

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Commissioner Graham, Chairman of the Education Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-24 and stated the Education Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Graham, seconded by Commissioner Beck, to adopt Resolution No. 126-24.

There were no questions from the Commissioners or the audience.

The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

**RESOLUTION NO. 126-25 A RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A NEW COMPLIANCE
STRUCTURE FOR HAMILTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT.**

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Commissioner Helton, Chairman of the Rules and Legislative Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-25 and stated the Rules and Legislative Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Helton, seconded by Commissioner Graham, to adopt Resolution No. 126-25.

18:54 Commissioner Sharpe spoke in opposition to the resolution, stating the proposed compliance structure did not meet his expectations. He expressed concerns regarding the compliance officer's lack of independence, the reporting structure under the executive branch, potential conflicts of interest, and insufficient staffing and resources. He stated the resolution would expand executive authority without providing meaningful oversight or accountability and announced he would vote against it. A copy of the Department of Justice (DOJ) sentencing guidelines has been filed with the Clerk's Office.

29:00 In response to Commissioner Eversole's questions, County Attorney Varnell stated the resolution originated from recommendations in the Baker Donelson compliance review and explained the proposed compliance division would operate within the County Attorney's Office. She stated the structure reflects the majority of the consultant's recommendations and would include one new compliance officer position,

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with the office responsible for assessing countywide compliance. She stated the resolution would move the County in the right direction.

31:45

In response to Commissioner Eversole's question, Assistant Financial Administrator Vonda Patrick stated the County has already budgeted for two positions related to compliance and confirmed there are no additional budget needs associated with the resolution.

32:33

Commissioner Shipley expressed disagreement with concerns raised about the proposed compliance structure and stated confidence in County Attorney Varnell's integrity and judgment. He indicated support for the resolution.

34:16

In response to Commissioner Highlander's question, County Attorney Varnell confirmed the proposed compliance structure aligns with the recommendations of the Baker Donelson report. She explained the structure includes an internal compliance work group composed of County administrators and a compliance committee of the Commission. She stated the compliance officer would report findings to both the County administration and the Commission and would have direct access to the Commission at any time.

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36:27 In response to Commissioner Mackey's question, County Attorney Varnell stated a delay in voting would not significantly impact current compliance efforts or the planned hiring process.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Mackey, seconded by Commissioner Beck, to defer Resolution No. 126-25 until February 4, 2026.

38:37 In response to Commissioner Baker's question, County Attorney Varnell stated the County engaged Baker Donelson in March 2025 (*Resolution No. 425-13*) for a compliance review, with an investment of approximately \$40,000.

Commissioner Baker stated the issue has been under discussion for an extended period and expressed support for proceeding with a vote on the resolution.

39:33 Commissioner Sharpe stated his comments were directed toward policy and structure rather than individuals and noted his concerns related to long-term accountability, legality, and functionality of the proposed compliance structure.

41:13 In response to Commissioner Sharpe's question, County Attorney Varnell stated her office would handle any compliance related legal matters in accordance with ethical rules, including evaluating potential conflicts of interest on a case-by-case basis.

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41:39 At this time, Commissioner Mackey withdrew his motion, and Commissioner Beck withdrew his second to defer Resolution No. 126-25 until February 4, 2026.

42:36 Kathy Lennon, residing at 401 Crisman Street, spoke in opposition to the resolution. She expressed concerns regarding the lack of a defined job description, budget clarity, and independence for the proposed compliance officer position. She stated the compliance function would be more appropriately placed under the Commission to ensure accountability.

45:55 Commissioner Helton stated the Baker Donelson report includes a job description for the proposed compliance officer position. He noted the full document was not included in the meeting materials due to attorney-client privilege, but indicated that portions, such as the job description, could be shared without violating that privilege.

46:46 County Attorney Varnell stated the drafted job description could be circulated and published if the resolution is approved.

The foregoing Motion passed on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye,"

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Commissioner Highlander, “Aye,” Commissioner Mackey, “Aye,” Commissioner Sharpe, “Nay,” Commissioner Shipley, “Aye,” and Chairman Smith, “Aye.” Total present – 11.
Total absent – 0. Total “Aye” votes – 10. Total “Nay” votes – 1.

**RESOLUTION NO. 126-26 A RESOLUTION TO REZONE FROM A-1
47:45 AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT AND R-2A RURAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT TO C-2
LOCAL BUSINESS COMMERCIAL DISTRICT WITH CONDITIONS FOR THE
PROPERTY LOCATED AT 2425 AND 2501 SUCK CREEK ROAD.**

Commissioner Highlander, Chairman of the Public Works and Zoning Committee, provided details regarding Resolution No. 126-26 and stated the Public Works and Zoning Committee reviewed and recommended approval.

ON MOTION of Commissioner Graham, seconded by Commissioner Sharpe, to adopt Resolution No. 126-26.

48:25 Tim Borrer, residing at 2425 Suck Creek Road, spoke in support of the resolution and stated he was seeking approval to move forward with the rezoning.

There were no questions from the Commissioners.

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The foregoing Motion was unanimously adopted on a Roll Call vote, with the following members of the County Commission being present and voting as follows: Commissioner Baker, "Aye," Commissioner Beck, "Aye," Commissioner Chauncey, "Aye," Commissioner Eversole, "Aye," Commissioner Graham, "Aye," Commissioner Helton, "Aye," Commissioner Highlander, "Aye," Commissioner Mackey, "Aye," Commissioner Sharpe, "Aye," Commissioner Shipley, "Aye," and Chairman Smith, "Aye." Total present – 11. Total absent – 0. Total "Aye" votes – 11. Total "Nay" votes – 0.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Smith asked for announcements from members of the Commission.

49:34 Commissioner Baker sent his best wishes to the President and CEO of the Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport, April Cameron, regarding her mother's recent surgery.

At this time, several Commissioners acknowledged the passing of former Tennessee State Representative Dr. Tommie Brown and expressed their condolences to her family. Commissioner Mackey stated his intention to present a future resolution recognizing her contributions to the community.

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50:36 Commissioner Beck noted the anticipated weather conditions and requested Director of Emergency Management Chris Adams provide an update on countywide preparations.

51:10 Mr. Adams reported coordination among County departments and partner agencies to maintain road access, power, water, and critical services. He noted forecasts remain uncertain, but the County is prepared should significant weather impacts occur.

55:40 In response to Commissioner Sharpe's question, Director of Development Services Nathan Janeway stated the County is taking a cautious approach regarding the Hilltop Road extension project and is reviewing alternative options following the decision to step away from the land swap proposal. He stated staff is evaluating alternatives to ensure the effective use of taxpayer funds and indicated he would discuss the matter with the County Attorney's Office as the review continues.

57:02 Commissioner Helton announced the Friends of Apison and East Brainerd will hold their monthly meeting on January 24, 2026, at 9:00 AM at 1067 Graysville Road, weather permitting. He noted the meeting would be rescheduled for the following Saturday if necessary and stated the guest speaker will be Janice Robertson, founder of the Snack Pack Program, who will discuss the organization's work in the community.

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57:38 Commissioner Highlander thanked Emergency Management and Highway Department staff for winter weather preparedness efforts and urged caution when driving in hazardous winter conditions. He also expressed concerns about traffic safety in the Hilltop Road area due to increased development and emphasized the need for improved interstate access in Ooltewah.

59:07 Commissioner Eversole thanked Mayor Wamp for inviting Commissioners to tour Bess T. Shepherd Elementary School and commended school leadership, emphasizing the need for continued facility maintenance. He also reported meeting with Assistant Financial Administrator Vonda Patrick, and Deputy County Mayor of Education and Workforce Development Tucker McClendon, and stated budget hearings for the upcoming fiscal year are expected to begin in March, with the goal of starting earlier to avoid congestion later in the budget season. Additionally, he raised a constituent inquiry regarding the livestreaming of Election Commission meetings.

1:00:56 In response to Commissioner Eversole's question, County Attorney Varnell stated she would inquire about the feasibility of livestreaming Election Commission meetings.

1:01:48 Commissioner Graham thanked volunteers who participated in the recent Wreaths Across Chattanooga wreath pickup at the Chattanooga National Cemetery. He highlighted the strong community turnout, including teachers and students, and noted

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the educational impact of students learning about veterans while participating in the event.

1:04:20

Mayor Wamp addressed public comments regarding *Resolution No. 126-25*. He clarified statements made about the number of deputy mayors and addressed references to members of his administration, including Deputy County Mayor of Education and Workforce Development Tucker McClendon, Deputy County Mayor of Economic and Community Development Cory Gearrin, and Chief Operating Officer David Roddy. He highlighted his staff's experience, service, and contributions to the County, and emphasized his confidence in their professionalism and work on behalf of Hamilton County residents.

1:07:19

Chairman Smith recognized Chattanooga City Court Clerk Anthony Byrd in the audience, acknowledging him as a former City Council member and a personal friend.

Commissioner Baker acknowledged former District 5 Commissioner Katherlyn Geter in the audience.

DELEGATIONS

Chairman Smith asked for delegations on matters other than zoning.

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1:08:22 Jeff Meldahl, residing at 109 Ochs Highway, stated he is president of the Chattanooga Area Labor Council and spoke regarding the proposed Jailhouse Studios project. He urged the Commission to allow sufficient public review when public assets are involved and to seek commitments from developers on local hiring, apprenticeship opportunities, and transparent bidding timelines to benefit local workers.

1:11:28 Katie Campassi, residing in District 6, stated she is a local theater and film professional. She expressed concerns about the proposed Jailhouse Studios project, requesting clarity on what specific entertainment jobs would be created for local workers, whether positions would be hired locally, and how jobs would be advertised.

1:14:29 Josh Branum, the Governmental Affairs Director for the Real Estate Association, with an office at 2963 Amnicola Highway, presented highlights from the 2025 Hamilton County housing statistics. He noted increased housing inventory, a slight decrease in closed sales, a median sales price of \$390,000, and an average of 47 days on the market. A copy of the handout has been filed with the Clerk's Office.

1:16:18 Arthur Shipley, residing at 3109 Gold Point Circle South, questioned why the Hixson area lacks a household trash disposal unit, noting residents must travel long distances to dispose of household waste. He also asked why environmental impact studies have not been conducted for current and future residential development in that area of Hamilton County.

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1:17:00 Jeff Vandergriff, residing at 5614 Pearl Street, addressed the Commission regarding his arrest, court appearances, and detention. He stated his purpose in speaking was to make the Commission aware of his experience and concerns regarding how he was treated.

 There being no further business, Chairman Smith declared the meeting in recess until Wednesday, January 28, 2026, at 4:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

William F. (Bill) Knowles, County Clerk

Approved:

2-04-2026 W.F.K

Date Clerk's Initials