

**HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSION
AGENDA PREPARATION SESSION
FEBRUARY 25, 2026**

PRESENTATION- PROCLAMATION HONORING STEPHEN GASTON

0:55 Commissioner Shipley presented a proclamation recognizing Stephen Gaston for thirty-two years of dedicated service to the voters of Hamilton County through the Hamilton County Election Commission. He highlighted Mr. Gaston's numerous roles within the Election Commission and his contributions to election administration and integrity.

1:11 At this time, Commissioner Shipley asked Deputy County Clerk Macey Mahaffey to read the proclamation honoring Stephen Gaston into the record. A copy of the Proclamation has been filed with the Clerk's Office.

A round of applause was given.

Mr. Gaston expressed appreciation to the Commission and stated that it has been a pleasure serving the citizens of Hamilton County for thirty-two years.

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PRESENTATION – DR. CAROL B. BERZ FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

5:30 Executive Director of the Dr. Carol B. Berz Family Justice Center, Regina McDevitt, recognized members of the Family Justice Center in the audience.

Ms. McDevitt provided an update on the Center’s coordinated, multi-agency services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, elder abuse, and child abuse. She reported serving more than 900 individuals and providing over 5,000 services in the past year, and discussed future initiatives, including expanded services and relocation of the Rape Crisis Center. A copy of the presentation and handouts has been filed with the Clerk’s Office.

17:47 At this time, several Commissioners expressed appreciation for Ms. McDevitt and thanked her for the update.

19:44 In response to Chairman Smith’s question, Ms. McDevitt stated construction for the relocation of the Rape Crisis Center is expected to begin in the summer, with completion anticipated in 2027.

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22:10

In response to Commissioner Graham's question, Ms. McDevitt stated the Center employs two bilingual staff members to assist Spanish-speaking residents and improve access to services.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Chairman Smith indicated the upcoming agenda items would be considered as follows:

- Resolution No. 326-1 was the usual County Clerk item regarding notaries, etc. This required no committee assignment.
- Resolution Nos. 326-3 and 326-4 were assigned to the Rules and Legislative Committee, chaired by Commissioner Helton.
- Resolution No. 326-5 was assigned to the Building and Economic Development Committee, chaired by Commissioner Shipley.
- Resolution Nos. 326-6 through 326-9 were assigned to the Public Safety Committee, chaired by Commissioner Beck.
- Resolution No. 326-10 was assigned to the Public Works and Zoning Committee, chaired by Commissioner Highlander.
- Resolution No. 326-11 was assigned to the Finance and Budget Committee, chaired by Commissioner Eversole.
- Resolution No. 326-2 was heard by a Committee of the Whole.

23:17

RESOLUTION NO. 326-1 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.

There were no questions from Commissioners or the audience.

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23:34 **RESOLUTION NO. 326-2 A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE INTENT AND WILL
OF THE HAMILTON COUNTY COMMISSION TO CONVEY APPROXIMATELY 1,300
ACRES PREDOMINANTLY WEST OF THE RAIL LINE OF THE MCDONALD FARM
PROPERTY TO THE STATE OF TENNESSEE FOR THE PURPOSE OF CREATING
A STATE PARK.**

23:53 Mayor Wamp stated the resolution represents a historic investment opportunity
proposed by Governor Bill Lee. He noted the McDonald Farm property has been
evaluated for its highest and best use in coordination with state officials, and the
proposed recreational investment reflects Tennessee's commitment to the outdoor
economy. He stated the project would include approximately \$45.3 million in state
funding and could represent the largest capital investment in the history of District 1.

26:11 Director of Tennessee State Parks Chris Padgett expressed support for the
resolution and stated the proposed park at McDonald Farm would become Tennessee's
70th state park, to be known as Roaring Creek State Park.

30:45 In response to Commissioner Highlander's question, Mayor Wamp stated the
County's prorated land value of approximately \$10 million would leverage the State's
\$45.3 million investment and is projected to generate an estimated \$100 million
economic impact over ten years.

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37:08

In response to Commissioner Eversole's question, Mayor Wamp stated the County would retain portions of the property, including the McDonald homestead area for continued County Park use, as well as additional acreage that may be evaluated for future development opportunities.

42:15

In response to Commissioner Sharpe's question, Mayor Wamp stated economic impact projections are based on comparable state parks and noted that supporting data would be provided to the Commissioners. Mr. Padgett stated the park would receive just over \$1 million annually for operations and maintenance, funded through Tennessee State Parks revenue generation.

47:05

In response to Commissioner Mackey's question, Director of Development Services Nathan Janeway stated there are no current plans to extend sewer service to the property and noted on-site systems would be utilized if necessary.

At this time, several Commissioners expressed support for the resolution.

There were no questions from the audience.

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1:00:55

Commissioner Helton, Chairman of the Rules and Legislative Committee, stated the Rules and Legislative Committee would meet in the Commission Room immediately following today's Agenda Preparation Session adjournment.

Commissioner Shipley, Chairman of the Building and Economic Development Committee, stated the Building and Economic Development Committee would meet in the Commission Room immediately following today's Rules and Legislative Committee.

Commissioner Beck, Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, stated the Public Safety Committee would meet in the Commission Room immediately following today's Building and Economic Development Committee.

Commissioner Highlander, Chairman of the Public Works and Zoning Committee, stated the Public Works and Zoning Committee would meet in the Commission Room immediately following today's Public Safety Committee.

Commissioner Eversole, Chairman of the Finance and Budget Committee, stated the Finance and Budget Committee would meet in the Commission Room immediately following today's Public Works and Zoning Committee.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Smith asked for announcements from members of the Commission.

1:01:30

Commissioner Baker stated he had attended meetings at the State Capitol and encouraged members of the public to review Senate Bill 564 and House Bill 803, which relate to decentralized systems. He expressed concerns regarding the legislation and thanked Tennessee Senator Bo Watson for working on proposed amendments.

1:02:13

Commissioner Helton announced the Friends of Apison and East Brainerd's monthly breakfast on February 28, 2026, at 9:00 AM at 1067 Graysville Road. He stated Regina McDevitt, Executive Director of the Dr. Carol B. Berz Family Justice Center, will be the guest speaker.

1:02:37

Commissioner Highlander announced Districts 9 and 10 will host a Community and Education Forum on March 2, 2026, from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM at the Harrison Community Center and invited the public to attend. He also echoed Commissioner Baker's concerns regarding state legislation on decentralized systems and possible unfunded mandates for county taxpayers.

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1:03:29

Commissioner Eversole requested prayers for former Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Hammond and his wife, Jeanie Hammond, who recently underwent surgery. He announced Storm Safety Day will be held February 26, 2026, from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM at The Commons in Collegedale and encouraged residents to bring weather alert radios for programming. He stated budget hearings will begin on March 4, 2026, at 3:00 PM prior to the regular Commission meeting, and noted departments have been asked to address requested investments, maintained expenditures, and operational transitions.

1:07:03

Commissioner Graham expressed appreciation to Sheriff Garrett for meeting with constituents to address concerns and stated they were grateful for the opportunity to have their questions answered. He commended the Sheriff for his willingness to engage with the public.

1:08:16

Chairman Smith announced the Hamilton County Citizen Engagement Group town hall previously scheduled for March 5, 2026, has been postponed, with a new date to be determined. He stated the Cherry Street parking garage will be free to the public beginning at 3:45 PM on Wednesdays to accommodate attendance at the 4:00 PM Commission meetings and thanked County staff for implementing this change.

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DELEGATIONS

Chairman Smith asked for delegations on matters other than zoning.

1:09:25 Jennifer Duvall, residing at 1825 Coulterville Road, expressed appreciation to the Commission for its consideration of *Resolution No. 326-2*, stating it reflects responsible stewardship and will benefit the community. She noted Hixson High School recently experienced a loss and encouraged parents to provide support to their children.

1:12:39 Jeff Meldahl, residing at 109 Ochs Highway, stated he is president of the Chattanooga Area Labor Council and thanked Commissioners who supported Local 42 workers at Volkswagen during recent contract negotiations. He encouraged the Commission to permanently move Commission meeting times to 5:00 PM to improve accessibility for working residents.

1:14:12 Jessica Alexander, residing at 733 Battery Place, spoke regarding recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in the community and the Sheriff's Office's participation in the 287(g) Jail Enforcement Agreement. She requested the Commission consider policies limiting local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement and related budget actions.

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1:17:45 Hamilton County Sheriff Garrett stated the Sheriff's Office participates only in the 287(g)-jail model, which involves completing federal documentation for individuals already in custody on state charges. He stated the Sheriff's Office does not conduct worksite enforcement, does not engage in racial profiling, and treats all individuals equally under the law. He further explained that individuals who cannot verify their identity for state law violations are taken into custody and processed, and any federal holds are placed by federal agencies.

1:23:35 In response to Commissioner Sharpe, Sheriff Garrett stated the County is reimbursed by the federal government for housing federal prisoners in the County jail and noted such arrangements have existed for many years. He stated he declined a request to create dedicated housing for federal immigration detainees. He also clarified that not all law enforcement activity in the County involves ICE and stated he did not believe the recent enforcement activity referenced involved local law enforcement agencies.

1:25:58 Commissioner Beck stated the issue had previously been discussed in the Public Safety Committee and expressed appreciation to Sheriff Garrett for addressing the matter. He encouraged members of the public to attend committee or community meetings to discuss further.

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1:28:41 Hamilton County Circuit Court Judge Alex McVeagh announced the annual high school mock trial competition was being held at the courthouse and noted participation from multiple local schools. He stated the competition involves students conducting a simulated criminal trial and thanked local judges, attorneys, and Sheriff’s Office personnel for their support.

 There being no further business, Chairman Smith adjourned the meeting to Wednesday, March 4th, at 4:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

William F. (Bill) Knowles, County Clerk

Approved:

<u>03-18-26</u>	<u>W.F.K</u>
Date	Clerk’s Initials