



Observer Corps Report

Observer: Tanya Phillips

Meeting Observed: Knox County Commission

Meeting Date: 03.23.26

Agenda: [Knox County Commission Agenda 03.23.26](#)

Video Recording: [Commission Recording](#) (Commission meeting starts at 1:25:25)

Three Main Observations:

1. Ordinance [O-26-2-101](#) passed on its 2nd reading. This ordinance will place control and supervision of the East Tennessee Juvenile Service Center under the Knox County Juvenile Court Judge starting April 1, 2026, and it also includes a seven-member Advisory Board. The vote was 10-1, with Commissioner Russell voting no.
2. Ordinance [O-26-3-101](#) that would phase out the \$36/year wheel tax over 5 years starting in July 2026 was postponed until August. The wheel tax generates about \$15.5MM a year, and due to budget concerns, the Commission voted to postpone the ordinance until after the 2026-2027 budget is approved. The vote was 9-1 with Commissioner Jackson voting no and Commissioner Jay abstaining.
3. Resolution [R-26-3-112](#) to accept the resignation of Daniel Herrera on the Knox County Sheriff's Office Employees' Merit System Board of Directors and appoint Adam Cook to serve the unfulfilled term, which will expire September 30, 2028, was passed with a vote of 8-3 with Commissioners Russell, Lee, and Fox voting no.

Feature Evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Meeting started on time?	X		Started at 5:03; adjourned at 7:00
All members present?	X		Mayor Jacobs, KCS Superintendent Jon Rysewyk, and School Board Representative Anne Templeton were present.
Members attentive?	X		
Did members come prepared to discuss agenda items?	X		

Agenda posted 72 hours prior to meeting?	X		
Agenda items clearly described what was to be discussed?	X		
Adequate opportunity given for public input?	X		1 person spoke during public forum open topics
Was there an appearance that some action items were discussed in closed rather than open session?		X	
Was background information available to the public?	X		
Facilities adequate (room size, lighting, ventilation, speakers, audible, ADA accessible)?	X		

Were there any issues on the agenda relevant to LWV positions or programs? View the League’s [National](#), [State](#), and [LWVKKC](#) policy positions.

LWVKKC Policy Positions: Childcare, Land Use, Health, Homeless/Mentally Ill Persons, Urban Forestry, Use of School Facilities by Communities, Teacher Recruitment & Retention

League Position	Issue

Do you recommend League action on any of these issues?

None currently.

Other notes/concerns?

- Rural Metro Presentation – Jerry Harnish – Director of Operations at American Medical Response (AMR) and Chief Greg Miller
 - Knoxville is divided into three response zones. In April 2024, they came into compliance with the first zone, the second one by June 2024, and since July 2024, they’ve been compliant with all three zones, except for October and December 2024.
 - This is the first time since 2001 that the 911 ambulance service is at full staff.
 - Most of the country’s EMS systems were hurt during the COVID pandemic, and only a few counties have the turnaround that Knox County has achieved. We are seen as an exceptional

example of how to improve emergency services and provide good care, and other counties want to emulate what we have done here, Contributors to the improvement are wage adjustments to attract good talent, contract with subcontractor to handle deceased calls to prevent ambulance services getting diverted for non-emergency services, operational improvements for call processing, use of quick response vehicles, nurse navigation, and engagement in the mission districts.

- In 2025, there were zero penalties, zero fines, and they were compliant in every metric.
- Ordinance [O-26-2-101](#) passed on its 2nd reading. This ordinance will place control and supervision of the East Tennessee Juvenile Service Center under the Knox County Juvenile Court Judge starting April 1, 2026, and it includes a seven-member Advisory Board. The vote was 10-1, with Commissioner Russell voting no.
 - Commissioner Russell reiterated her concerns from last month. Although she has no concerns with turning over the Juvenile Center to the Juvenile Court Judge, she is apprehensive about the number of Advisory Board members that are selected by the Judge, and she prefers they be selected by the Commission.
- Ordinance [O-26-3-101](#) that would phase out the \$36/year wheel tax over 5 years starting in July 2026 was postponed until August. The wheel tax generates about \$15.5MM a year, and due to budget concerns, the Commission voted to postpone the ordinance until after the 2026-2027 budget is approved. The vote was 9-1 with Commissioner Jackson voting no and Commissioner Jay abstaining.
 - Commissioner Jay sponsored the ordinance because the wheel tax is a double taxation on the citizens of Knox County since we are taxing people for the use of our roads and highways, which they have already paid for. There were promises that the wheel tax would be used to fund a new downtown library, which was never delivered, and the county is less competitive since 6 of the 9 surrounding counties do not have a wheel tax.
 - Commissioner Jay says his proposal reduces next year's total budget by 0.15%, which equates to around \$1.7MM. Since the county is almost \$8MM ahead in this year's budget, we can afford it. He asserts that we will still be able to fully fund everything that the wheel tax goes toward now.
 - Commissioner Durrett seconded the motion, but she made it clear that it was to only allow discussion with Commissioners and should not be mistaken as support for the ordinance.
 - Commissioners Durrett, Russell, and Hill had concerns for timing and wanted to push it a couple of months to get through budget discussions.
 - Commissioner Jackson is in support of repealing the wheel tax, but also had concerns with the timing since budget discussions are ongoing; however, he was ready to vote on the ordinance.
 - Commissioner Thompson disagreed that the impact to the budget was 0.15% since the \$1.1B County total budget only has around \$150MM under the Commission's control after the School and Sheriff portions of the budget are removed; as a result, the impact is around 10%. Growth revenue is not guaranteed, which means we raise taxes somewhere else, or we cut services to offset the loss of revenue from the wheel tax.
 - Commissioner Hill made a substitute motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Russell, to postpone the ordinance until August, so they have a better understanding of next year's budget.
- Resolution [R-26-3-112](#) to accept the resignation of Daniel Herrera on the Knox County Sheriff's Office Employees' Merit System Board of Directors and appoint Adam Cook to serve the unfulfilled term, which will expire September 30, 2028, was passed with a vote of 8-3 with Commissioners Russell, Lee, and Fox voting no.
- One person spoke during public forum open topics on how influential the Bible was in early days, and in summary, he wants people to know that they shouldn't be afraid of the Bible or the ten commandments as they are a source of stability and peace.