



Observer Corps Report

Observer: Tanya Phillips

Meeting Observed: Knox County Commission

Meeting Date: 6.22.26

Agenda: [Knox County Commission Agenda 06.22.26](#)

Video Recording: [Knox County Commission Recording 06.22.26](#)

Three Main Observations:

1. Resolution, [R-26-6-904](#), approving a moratorium on data centers in Knox County passed 10-0. The resolution was amended during the meeting to add a referral to the Planning Commission and to increase peak electric demand from 5 MW to 10 MW to alleviate concerns from AT&T and Comcast that their existing facilities could fall under the moratorium. The resolution is effective immediately through June 30, 2027, or until the County adopts new regulations governing the placement and operation of data centers, whichever comes first.
2. Four Library Advisory Board seats were appointed. The District 5 appointment was notable since Becky Hofseth, who was reapplying for her current D5 seat, was at the podium for over half an hour, which was longer than the combined time for the three applicants from District 1. The Library Advisory Board serves the County Mayor in an advisory capacity and represents the interests of the district. Several Commissioners seemed concerned with Ms. Hofseth's ability to separate her personal preferences from the best interests of the district. The appointments for the four districts were: Jennie Mezick (D1), Emily Briano (D2), Karen Vigorito (D5), and Scott Muir (D8), and their terms expire July 1, 2029.
3. Motion by Commissioner Jay to change the deferral date of the ordinance, [O-26-3-101](#), that repeals the vehicle registration fees from August 2026 to the July 2026 agenda passed 8-3.

Feature Evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Meeting started on time?	X		Started at 5:01; adjourned at 10:20
All members present?	X		Commissioner Russell called into the meeting. Although the reason was not given, it was due to illness.
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		10 people spoke during public forum.
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		Room was very cold.

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
Support Individual Liberties	As it pertains to access to books in the Knox County Public Library System.

Do you recommend League action on any of these issues?

Continue to advocate for the freedom to read by supporting appointments for the Library Advisory Board who support the Knox County Public Library System, the American Library Association, and access to books in our public libraries.

Other notes/concerns?

- **Honorary Resolution, [R-26-6-101](#)**, honoring the **70th Anniversary of Knoxville-Knox County Planning**. Although there are exceptions, most honorary resolutions are supported by the full Commission; however, Commissioner Fox said he was voting no on the resolution because he thinks City and County Planning should be separate.
Honorary Resolution, [R-26-6-102](#), recognizes **July as Parks and Recreation Month** in Knox County.
- **Presentation** was given by Phil Ballard, Property Assessor to explain **Property Taxes & Reappraisal**. On the reappraisal timeline, they still at the first step of reappraisal notices and informal appeals. There are slightly less than 14K appeals, and around 11K appeals were made online. The Knox County current tax rate is 1.554 and the current estimated tax rate is 0.96.
- **Presentation** by Liz Eckelkamp from the UT Institute of Agriculture on **Tennessee's Dairy Industry** for National Dairy Month (June).
- **[RLA-18473](#)** – Proclamation recognizing the Constitution of the United States during the nation's 250th Anniversary.
- **Public Forum – Agenda Items:** Seven people spoke during public forum pertaining to agenda items. Two of the three people who spoke regarding the data center resolution were against data centers in Knox County, and the third person strongly recommended the moratorium resolution be sent to the Planning Commission since it would be a change to the zoning ordinance, and he cited several legal cases supporting his recommendation on why it would be prudent for the Planning Commission to review. Four people spoke in support of the re-appointment of Becky Hofseth to D5 Library Advisory Board.
- **Public Forum – Open Topics:** Three people spoke, and the first was a pastor that wanted to remind the Commission, as elected officials, to live up to their responsibility to obey God's law first. The second speaker addressed the budget amendment proposed by Commissioner Russell because he felt it was sound fiscal analysis, and not an attack on education. The third speaker shared his feelings of gratitude of living in America through the eyes of those visiting this country to attend the FIFA World Cup.
- **Four Library Advisory Board seats were appointed.** The district 5 appointment was notable since Becky Hofseth, who was reapplying for her current D5 seat, was at the podium for over half an hour, which was longer than the combined time for the three applicants from District 1. The Library Advisory Board serves the County Mayor in an advisory capacity and represents the interests of the district. Several Commissioners seemed concerned with Ms. Hofseth's ability to separate her personal preferences from the best interests of the district. The appointments for the four districts were: Jennie Mezick (D1), Emily Briano (D2), Karen Vigorito (D5), and Scott Muir (D8), and their terms expire July 1, 2029.
 - Applicants present that were interviewed: three for D1, two for D2, two for D5, and one for D8.
 - Some things of note that came up during the interviews: Two of the appointments are librarians: Ms. Mezick (D1) and Ms. Briano (D2). Ms. Hofseth was the only applicant that expressed the opinion that the Age-Appropriate Materials Act (AAMA) that applies to Knox County School Libraries should be considered by the Library Board for Knox County Public Libraries. Instead of a question on Ms. Vigorito's qualifications or why she was applying, Commissioner Russell's only question was how Ms. Vigorito heard about the position and if it was from another Commissioner.
 - To view the entire discussion for all four appointments, go to timestamp 1:39:20 in the video recording linked above.
- Resolution, **[R-26-6-904](#)**, approving a **moratorium on data centers** in Knox County passed 10-0. Commissioner Durrett recused herself due to her employment with Comcast. Last month, a resolution was sent to the Planning Commission to provide a recommendation for a zoning ordinance to regulate where data centers can be located, and this moratorium resolution was something Commissioner Fox

wanted to include with that resolution to prevent any new data centers from being built during the zoning approval process. There were some concerns over the details of the moratorium resolution from AT&T and Comcast because they feared their existing facilities could fall under the moratorium. Although Commissioner Fox and Deputy Law Director Moyers thought they would be excluded based on the current language of the resolution, Commissioner Fox was amenable to increasing the peak electric demand from 5 MW to 10 MW, which alleviated their concerns. Deputy Law Director Moyers also recommended that Commission send this resolution to the Planning Commission to avoid any potential legal issues pertaining to zoning. Although Commissioner Jay did speak out against the resolution since he felt it was being rushed through and was a solution in search of problem, he ultimately voted to pass it.

- [RLA-18474](#) – Motion by Commissioner Jay to **change the deferral date** of the ordinance, [O-26-3-101](#), that repeals the vehicle registration fees from August 2026 to the July 2026 agenda passed 8-3, with Commissioners Fox, Lee, and Russell voting no. Commissioner Oster did confirm before her vote that Commissioner Jay would have Finance present at the July meeting.
- Ordinance, [O-25-8-101](#), amending the section of the Knox County Code for “**Merit System Board of Directors**” passed on 2nd reading 9-2, with Commissioners Lee and Jay voting no. Qualifications were revised for members of the Merit System Board to be eligible to serve if they have not previously been employed by the Sheriff’s Office within the five years instead of ten years preceding their appointment and to remove the requirement that a person is not eligible to serve on the Merit System Board if any member of the person’s family is or becomes employed by the Knoxville Police Department. Commissioner Jay objected to the ordinance because he believes it erodes reforms that have been in place for several years that have increased confidence in a system that was been working well.
- Resolution, [R-26-6-905](#), amending the **Knox County Sheriff’s Office Employees’ Merit System Rules and Regulations** to support [O-25-8-101](#), and like the ordinance, the resolution passed 9-2 with Commissioners Lee and Jay voting no.
- Commissioner Fox **withdrew his “March Madness” discussion** where he planned to share his belief on why Islam was not fit for Western Civilization.