

**WEAKLEY COUNTY, TENNESSEE
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
CONFERENCE ROOM, WEAKLEY COUNTY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER
Monday, January 12, 2026, at 9:00 A.M.**

HEED Committee Members Present: Commissioners Bobby Dunlap, John Robert Freeman, David Hawks, Joey Mehlhorn, James Washburn and Jack Vincent

HEED Committee Members Absent: Commissioners James Roy Pope and Wade Cook

I. CALL TO ORDER -APPROVE MINUTES

Mayor Dale Hutcherson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Mayor Hutcherson informed those present that Chairperson Larry Kelly had passed away earlier in the morning. Mayor Hutcherson then requested a moment of silence in honor of Chairperson Kelly and his family. Commissioner Vincent motioned Commissioner Hawks assume the role of Chairperson Pro-Temp for the duration of this meeting. Upon receiving a second from Commissioner Freeman, the motion was approved unanimously. Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks called for consideration of the minutes from the previous meeting which was held on November 10, 2025. Commissioner Freeman made the motion to approve, Commissioner Mehlhorn seconded. The motion to approve the minutes passed unanimously.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

No application was made for public comment.

III. OLD BUSINESS

None.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of County Master Plan with Ian Preston from Gresham Smith: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Mayor Dale Hutcherson. Mayor Hutcherson advised he met with Ian Preston with Gresham Smith and Economic Development Director Justin Crice to discuss a comprehensive master plan for Weakley County. Mayor Hutcherson emphasized that this plan is designed to lay a strategic foundation for sustainable future growth, infrastructure development, and industrial recruitment. He highlighted that the initiative has been a collaborative effort involving Alicia Melton at the University of Tennessee at Martin and emphasized that the project comes at zero cost to the county taxpayers, as it is a state initiative funded through West Tennessee planning and Tennessee ECD. Director Crice stressed the importance of the County Commission's involvement and "blessing" of the plan, noting that it represents all nine districts and is essential for the county's future growth.

Ian Preston then provided a detailed overview of the planning services, which are offered through a five-year engagement with Tennessee ECD. Preston explained the project would focus on five key elements: land use and zoning, housing and neighborhoods (including student housing for UT Martin), economic development strategic growth, policy and financial opportunities, and public utilities and infrastructure. The planning process will rely heavily on public involvement, utilizing online surveys, community workshops, and student engagement at UT Martin to gather data on commuting habits and local needs. Preston outlined a timeline that includes a formal kickoff meeting on February 25, 2026, followed by several months of data gathering regarding environmental constraints and infrastructure. A stakeholder committee, comprising local leaders such as the UT Martin Chancellor and various department heads, will meet monthly to oversee the plan's development. The goal is to deliver a completed plan by the end of 2026, which will serve as a blueprint to help the county secure state grants for physical construction and investment.

Commissioner Freeman made a motion to combine resolutions 2026-30, 2026-31, 2026-32 and 2026-33. Commissioner Mehlhorn seconded the motion. The resolutions were opened for discussion.

Resolution 2026-30 Resolution Authorizing Budget Amendments to the General-Purpose School Fund for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Director of Weakley County Schools, Jeff Cupples. Director Cupples reported the schools were awarded \$4,000 for Healthier Schools grant program. The funds from this grant will be transferred to the other supplies and materials budget line.

Resolution 2026-31 Resolution Authorizing Budget Amendments to the General-Purpose School Fund for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Director of Weakley County Schools, Jeff Cupples. Director Cupples stated the schools were awarded a Public Schools Security Grant for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, with a portion remaining unspent at year-end. The balance of \$81,878 will primarily be allocated to upgrading the school security system from analog to digital.

Resolution 2026-32 Resolution Authorizing Budget Amendments to the General-Purpose School Fund for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Director of Weakley County Schools, Jeff Cupples. Director Cupples announced that the schools have been awarded two Energy Savings Grants from the Tennessee Valley Authority totaling \$36,190. These funds will be allocated to the other contracted services budget line.

Resolution 2026-33 Resolution Authorizing Budget Amendments to the General-Purpose School Fund for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Director of Weakley County Schools, Jeff Cupples. Director Cupples stated the schools were awarded a Batelle STEM classroom grant for the Special Education Transition program in the amount of \$960. These funds will be allocated to the other supplies and materials budget line for the program to purchase supplies for their projects.

Commissioner Freeman made a motion to place resolutions 2026-30, 2026-31, 2026-32 and 2026-33 on the floor. Following a second by Commissioner Mehlhorn, the resolutions passed unanimously.

Resolution 2026-34 Resolution Authorizing Budget Amendments to the General Fund for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026: Commissioner Freeman made a motion to place the resolution on the floor and with a second from Commissioner Mehlhorn the resolution was opened for discussion. Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Weakley County Finance Director, John Liggett. Director Liggett advised Weakley County was awarded a Broadband Readiness Communities Grant in the 2024-2025 fiscal year and a portion of the award was unspent at the end of the fiscal year. This amount needs to be added to the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget to expend the remaining grant funds. The resolution passed unanimously.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

Discussion Regarding Weakley County Schools Daycare: Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks recognized Director of Weakley County Schools, Jeff Cupples. Director Cupples presented a formal proposal for the establishment of a school ran and state-approved childcare facility designed to address a shortage of childcare seats in the region. Originally conceived as a recruitment tool for teachers, the project has evolved into a broader economic development initiative aimed at both retention and workforce participation. Data suggests that Weakley County currently faces a significant deficit in childcare availability, classified near "desert" status with a negative -135 seats, which contributes to an estimated \$16 million annual loss in local economic productivity. By providing reliable, high-quality care, the

district aims to prevent the "poaching" of high-performing staff by neighboring counties that have already implemented similar programs.

The proposed facility would be located within the personal development center, utilizing a flexible design to accommodate between 62 and 100 students, ranging from six weeks old to Pre-K age. The project carries a turnkey cost of approximately \$725,000, which covers construction, furniture, and equipment. Funding will be sourced through a combination of a \$250,000 ASIM grant, FEMA reimbursements, and the existing fund balance, ensuring that no new local tax revenue is required. Operationally, the program is designed to be revenue-neutral, with tuition rates set at \$150 per week for infants and \$135 for toddlers to cover labor and liability insurance. Additional considerations included the relocation of the county archives to an adjacent bay to maximize the facility's footprint and the implementation of safety measures like ballistic-resistant film and security vestibules.

During the discussion, Chairperson Pro-Temp Hawks emphasized the importance of establishing a clear "tier" system for enrollment. While the initial focus was on school district staff, there was strong consensus that all county employees, including those from the highway department and courthouse, should receive priority access to seats alongside teachers. Director Cupples also highlighted a potential partnership with UT Martin to fill additional seats, though commissioners reiterated that local public servants should be served first.

The project is slated for a seven-month construction period following a formal resolution in March. If approved, the childcare center is projected to open in late October 2026. Beyond providing childcare, the center will serve as a training ground for high school students in the Child Development pathway, creating a sustainable pipeline for the county's future workforce. Director Cupples concluded by noting that the investment in early childhood education offers a significant return on investment for the county's long-term health and graduate readiness.

VI. ADJOURN

Seeing no other business, Commissioner Washburn made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Freeman seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Melinda Parham, Secretary
HEED Committee

Approved:



Chairperson
Heed Committee

Date: 3/9/26