



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mayor Burchett focuses on service, efficiency and savings in first year in office

Knoxville, Tenn. — One year ago today, Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett took the oath of office with the support of the Knox County community behind him and the promise of restoring trust and transparency in Knox County Government by focusing on three core principles: service, efficiency and savings. A year later, that trust is being restored by making sure Knox County Government is more accountable and accessible to taxpayers.

By identifying efficiencies and savings over the past year, Mayor Burchett has saved taxpayers more than \$10 million, all without negatively impacting the services our citizens receive. Along the way, Mayor Burchett has also worked to increase transparency in government operations, utilize business-like models, and has made himself accessible to citizens across Knox County.

“I am thankful to the voters of Knox County for giving me the opportunity to be their mayor, and I am proud to say that over the past year I have worked extremely hard to do the job they sent me here to do,” Mayor Burchett said. “Over the next three years, I will continue to focus on saving our taxpayers’ money by providing efficient service to our citizens, while also supporting the private sector in strengthening our local economy.”

Several notable initiatives mark Mayor Burchett’s first year in office, including:

- **FY 2011-2012 Budget** – Mayor Burchett’s inaugural budget was centered on saving taxpayer money while also making Knox County Government more streamlined and efficient without any loss of services. The general operating budget, which does not include schools, is \$2.3 million less than the FY2010-2011 budget. Commission approved the mayor’s FY2011-2012 budget virtually unchanged. With the goal of increasing transparency and trust in county government, Mayor Burchett’s budget process included visits to all nine Commission districts to present his spending plan to taxpayers and to hear their thoughts and suggestions. In addition to making the mayor’s administrative office more efficient and reducing the office’s FY2012 budget by nearly 20 percent, Mayor Burchett saved taxpayers \$219,560 by not spending all of the \$1,113,689 administrative budget that was allowed in the FY2011 budget.
- **Reduce Debt** – Paying millions in interest on long-term bonds is not an efficient use of taxpayer dollars, especially when reducing interest and overall debt is an option. That is why one of Mayor Burchett’s first acts as mayor was to move forward with the refinancing of \$35 million in county debt, which resulted in an overall savings of more than \$3.8 million. The mayor’s current budget also will reduce the overall county debt by \$20 million this fiscal year, and it sets the pace for an overall debt reduction of \$100 million over the next five years. Reducing debt allows Knox County to save money by freeing up funding for needed services.

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- **Expanded Library Hours** – By increasing efficiency in staffing and other areas, Mayor Burchett and Library Director Myretta Black were able to restore 177.5 service hours to libraries system-wide without additional tax dollars. Doing more without spending more is key to ensuring high-quality service to our citizens at a savings to our taxpayers.
- **E-Commerce Cards** – Shortly after taking office, Mayor Burchett increased transparency in the E-commerce card program by unveiling a searchable online E-commerce card transaction database that allows anyone to see when an E-commerce card transaction took place, how much it was for, whose card was used, and who the vendor was. Mayor Burchett also ordered more than 60 executive branch E-commerce cards cancelled. Increasing transparency and reducing the number of E-commerce cards help to ensure that tax dollars are being spent efficiently and in a way that helps maintain the necessary level of service to our citizens. The proper use of E-commerce cards continues to result in real-dollar savings through program rebates that are based on a percentage of overall E-commerce card transactions.
- **Purchase Order Database** –The need for increased transparency and efficiency does not only apply to electronic purchases, which is why Mayor Burchett directed the Knox County Information Technology staff to create an online searchable purchase order database. The database, which is the first of its kind in Tennessee, allows anyone to see what items departments are buying when they submit a requisition to the Knox County Purchasing Department. By continuing to increase transparency in countywide purchasing, Mayor Burchett is helping to ensure that Knox County services are being provided efficiently and at a savings to our taxpayers, whenever possible. Transparency measures like this help to restore the public’s trust in Knox County Government.
- **Health Department Savings** – Mayor Burchett and the Knox County Health Department were able to secure more than \$2 million in savings over four years using business-like models to efficiently deliver important medical services to our citizens. Knox County contracted with Cherokee Health Systems for pediatric care for nearly \$2 million in savings over four years, and contracted out Health Department translation services for a savings of approximately \$720,000 over four years.
- **Carter Elementary School Plan** – Educating children is arguably the most important service provided by Knox County Government. That is why Mayor Burchett believes that constructing a new Carter Elementary School, rather than renovating the old one, is the most effective way to provide the children in Carter a high-quality education in a high-quality facility. New construction will save money long-term on maintenance and upkeep, as well as energy costs. Mayor Burchett has put forth a business-minded plan to construct a new Carter Elementary School. The school would be entirely paid for upon completion, and doing so could save as much as \$7 million in interest that would be paid on bonds for a traditionally built school. Mayor Burchett continues to work with the Knox County Board of Education and the Knox County Commission in an effort gain approval of the plan. If approved, construction on the new school could begin in the fall.
- **Non-Profit Funding** – Understanding that government should not simply dole out tax dollars to non-profits, Mayor Burchett began the process of reducing grant funding to organizations and instead started shifting to defined services contracts that tie funding to services provided directly to Knox County citizens. This shift places an emphasis on outcomes and the efficient use of taxpayer dollars in order to avoid unnecessary spending, which will result in a savings to taxpayers.
- **Travel Allowances** – Mayor Burchett eliminated travel allowances for all senior staff immediately upon taking office. Over the course of the last fiscal year, that change resulted in a \$78,000 savings without having a negative impact on the services provided by each department. Mileage reimbursement, rather than travel allowances, has proven to be a much more efficient and transparent way to compensate employees for travel expenses.

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- **Vehicles Sold** – Mayor Burchett directed the purchasing department to sell several county vehicles that were not needed in our fleet. The sale of those vehicles included two SUVs that were driven by the previous mayor and chief of staff. The sale of 15 vehicles generated more than \$90,000 and resulted in thousands of dollars in savings in maintenance, fuel and liability costs that are no longer being incurred on those vehicles. These savings are being realized without a negative impact on the level of service provided by Knox County.
- **Greenwaste Facility Sold** – As part of his promise to focus county government on core services, as well as his belief that government should try to avoid competing with private sector businesses, Mayor Burchett got Knox County out of the mulch business by selling the Solway Greenwaste Facility property, with Commission’s approval, for \$2 million. The sale price was \$800,000 more than the property’s appraised value. Since it opened, Knox County has spent an average of \$245,000 per year on upkeep of the facility. The sale of the greenwaste facility was an efficient way to save money while also allowing services to be maintained for our citizens.
- **Infrastructure Improvements** – Mayor Burchett believes government does not create jobs, but can and should foster economic growth by investing in roads and infrastructure improvements that will encourage businesses to locate in Knox County. In his inaugural budget, Mayor Burchett increased funding for such improvements by \$364,000, after years of reductions to the road improvement budget. Using tax dollars efficiently to repair and maintain our roads and infrastructure is an important service that government should provide to all citizens.
- **Recreation Improvements** – Businesses look at quality of life and recreation opportunities when deciding whether to bring high-paying jobs to a particular community. During his first year in office, Mayor Burchett supported the construction or expansion of greenways in Halls and Northwest Knox County, as well as the advancement of the Knox-Blount Greenway Project.
- **Employee Benefits Changes** – Mayor Burchett addressed drastically increasing employee health benefit costs by seeking guidance from an advisory committee made up of private sector professionals who deal with employee health care on a regular basis. By listening to many of the committee’s recommendations, Mayor Burchett was able to realize a \$1.7 million savings for FY2011. Mayor Burchett recognizes that Knox County’s employees deserve quality health benefits, and he believes those benefits should be competitive with benefits found in the private sector and reflective of the level of benefits most taxpayers receive in their own jobs.

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