EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

September 11, 2026
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, September 11, 2026, at 1:05 p.m. in the East Tennessee Room of the D.P. Culp Student Center. The meeting was also live-streamed and recorded.

I. Call to Order

Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. She began by highlighting some of the university's recent successes and achievements. Among them:

- The opening of the new Academic Building, which reflects the university's commitment to student success, innovation, and the future
- The largest incoming class in university history, with 2,288 first-year students joining the ETSU family
- An unprecedented demand for the residential experience at ETSU, with 3,300 students living in residence halls

Chair Steagall-Jones then welcomed Dr. Bert J. Smith to the ETSU Board of Trustees. Dr. Smith earned his undergraduate degree from ETSU in 2000 and his M.D. degree from the Quillen College of Medicine in 2004. In addition, Chair Steagall-Jones welcomed new Student Trustee Thomas Bales from Greeneville, Tennessee. She then congratulated Trustees Charles Allen and Janet Ayers on their recent reappointments to the Board of Trustees by Governor Bill Lee.

II. Roll Call

Board Secretary Dr. Adam Green led the roll call.

Trustees physically present were:

Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones
Trustee Charles Allen
Trustee Janet Ayers
Trustee Thomas Bales
Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark
Trustee Dorothy Grisham
Trustee Jon Lundberg

Trustee Ron Ramsey
Trustee Dr. Bert Smith
Trustee Grant Summers
Trustee Tony Treadway

Dr. Green informed the board chair that a quorum was present.

III. Public Comments

No individuals were signed up to speak to the board during the public comment period.

IV. Approval of Minutes from May 21, 2026

The minutes from the May 21, 2026, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Janet Ayers making the motion to approve and Trustee Jon Lundberg seconding the motion. The Board approved the motion by voice vote.

V. Report from the Academic, Research, and Student Success Committee

Trustee Janet Ayers reported that during its morning meeting, the committee approved promotion and tenure for Dr. Lynette Hamlin, who joins ETSU as Associate Director of Research and Professor in the College of Nursing after a national search. Dr. Hamlin comes to ETSU from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, where she was Director of the Center for Military Women's Health Research. She has secured close to $18 million in external funding and has published over 35 peer-reviewed articles.

Trustee Ayers also reported to the Board that her committee approved the revised ETSU mission profile, which reflects recent changes to the university's Carnegie classification.

Trustee Ayers summarized a report given by Provost McCorkle on curricular actions that have taken place from January 1 through July 31, 2026. These include 29 that required notification to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. One of those is the newly approved Master of Science in Environment, Health, and Disaster Science. Trustee Ayers indicated that 35 curricular changes took place that did not require notification to the commission. Those include a new minor in Surveying and Mapping Science and a new Center for Community Engagement.

Trustee Ayers said her committee received an update on fall 2026 enrollment, with the university welcoming the largest freshman class in its history at 2,288 students, as well as a report on positive trends in overall undergraduate enrollment, first-year retention, and four-year graduation rates. Trustee Ayers noted that two individuals in particular were highlighted during the committee's meeting for their contributions to student success and community-building. They are Ethan Hutchinson, Executive Director of Academic Advisement, and Kelvin Tarukwasha, head of University Food Service operations. The

committee also received an update on the future opening of Buc Central, a one-stop shop for student services.

Trustee Ayers said the final presentation to the committee was given by Dr. Aaron Polichnowski, Associate Professor in the Quillen College of Medicine's Department of Biomedical Sciences. Dr. Polichnowski discussed his research on kidney disease and injury and the impact of his three grants funded by the National Institutes of Health.

VI. Report from the Audit Committee

Committee Chair Ron Ramsey reported to the board that his committee approved the annual audit plan for fiscal year 2027 and the Department of Internal Audit employee profiles. He indicated that the Department of Internal Audit has completed three audits, two investigations, and two advisory services since April. He said the committee reviewed the department's operating budget and the status of prior audit recommendations. He said the committee then went into executive session to discuss active audits and enterprise risk management and to review university risks and related internal controls. He added that no deliberations occurred, and no actions were taken.

VII. Report from the Finance and Administration Committee

Committee Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones reported that the committee approved the policy on use of out-of-state undergraduate tuition and fee revenues and heard a report about the work of the University Advancement Division and the ETSU Foundation. The report, she said, highlighted continued process improvements, expanded donor engagement, strong fund-raising results, and a clean Foundation audit.

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that the committee meeting included an announcement of a transformational gift in the amount of $15 million from the Phil and Martha Bachman Foundation. In recognition of this extraordinary commitment, she said, the committee recommends that the ETSU College of Arts and Sciences be named the Phil and Martha Bachman College of Arts and Sciences.

Chair Steagall-Jones indicated that the committee considered a proposed new employment agreement for President Noland. She said the committee recommends approval of the term sheet previously provided to the Trustees for the agreement effective January 1, 2027, and authorization for the board Chair, working with University Counsel, to negotiate, finalize, and execute the definitive agreement consistent with the approved term sheet.

Next, Chair Steagall-Jones said, the committee received the university's Composite Financial Index report for fiscal year 2025, showing that ETSU's FY25 CFI was 4.58, remaining above the standard benchmark of 3.0 and an indication of a sound financial position. The committee then heard a summary of the preliminary June financial statements, updated for June 2026. Overall, the results remain positive, with unrestricted

E&G revenues up by $26.7 million or 6.25 percent over the prior year. The committee also discussed the transition to Voyager and the resulting accounting and reporting changes. Discussion focused primarily on overall revenues and expenditures rather than individual line-item variances. The committee then heard a report of agreements of $250,000 or more for April through June.

Trustee Allen asked Chair Steagall-Jones whether she had stated that the proposed employment agreement was unanimously approved by the Finance and Administration Committee. Chair Steagall-Jones apologized if she had misspoken and clarified that the committee vote was three in favor and one opposed.

VIII. Consent Agenda

Chair Steagall-Jones asked if there were any items on the Consent Agenda that needed to be pulled for discussion and consideration. She then asked the board to pull item H., Employment Agreement, for individual consideration. Trustee Lundberg moved to approve the Consent Agenda as amended. Trustee Grisham seconded the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that the Finance and Administration Committee, in its morning meeting, passed a motion recommending the adoption of the following resolution by the Board of Trustees, approving the term sheet previously provided to the Trustees outlining a new employment agreement for Dr. Brian Noland. The resolution reads: "RESOLVED, that the East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees approves a new employment agreement for Dr. Brian Noland, effective January 1, 2027, with compensation and other terms of employment as set forth in the term sheet previously provided to the Trustees; and FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees authorizes and directs the Chair of the Board to work with ETSU's University Counsel to finalize and execute a definitive employment agreement consistent with the approved term sheet." Chair Steagall-Jones then moved for the adoption of the resolution as presented from the Finance and Administration Committee and asked for a second. Trustee Grant Summers seconded the motion.

Chairs Steagall-Jones then asked if there were any questions, comments, edits, or discussion.

Trustee Allen then offered the following *comments* and requested that they be included in the official record:

> *Trustee Allen stated that, as he mentioned in the Finance and Administration Committee, he has concerns about the contract. He said again that his concerns are not due to Dr. Noland at all and that he thinks Dr. Noland does a wonderful job for the University.*

Trustee Allen said that he had the following concerns about the structure of the agreement itself:

1. *It is structured as a five-year agreement with annual automatic renewals for an additional year. For each year that passes, an additional year is automatically added, and that happens with no input from the Board.*

2. *No other university in Tennessee has an agreement with that structure; they all have five-year fixed agreements. Almost all universities in the country have five-year or less fixed agreements. He acknowledged that he thought somebody had found an example of one university that had a longer agreement.*

3. *The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) is an association that ETSU belongs to which puts out best practices for boards on this type of thing and other governance matters. AGB recommends against this type of agreement and says it is inadvisable to have an agreement that is longer than five years.*

4. *In practicality, the way this agreement works, without action from the Board, after five years it still has five years to run, which makes it a ten-year contract.*

5. *Trustee Allen said that he does not think that is in the best interest of the University and that AGB agrees that it is not. The reason, which AGB spells out in its literature and its advice on how to handle presidents' contracts, is that AGB believes the Board needs to be involved annually in the review and renewal of the President's contract.*

6. *Under the terms of this agreement, the Board would have to take positive action for it not to automatically renew, and the Board is not involved in the review or evaluation of the President.*

He noted that when looking at a contract, one has to keep in mind that it may be somebody else in that seat. Even though the Board may think Dr. Noland is wonderful, and Trustee Allen agrees, he has a duty to look at the contract and vote for one he believes is in the best interest of the University, and he does not believe this one is.

Trustee Allen then asked the Chair a question. He asked, under the contract, if the Board wanted to take action to have the contract not automatically extend for one year, what are the terms for that to happen and what are the notice dates? He noted that AGB specifically recommends being sure such terms are spelled out,

including the notice date. He noted that the Chair was involved in the negotiation and asked what notice date had been agreed upon.

The Chair asked whether he meant the terms for the contract to renew or not to renew, and said there were several reasons. Trustee Allen said he was not asking for the reasons; he was asking for the notice date. The Chair stated that the term for each year is the calendar year end, December 31. Trustee Allen asked whether that meant no notice was required at all and the Board could act on December 31. The Chair responded by describing the President's evaluation process (the annual evaluation by the Chair, the 360 review conducted this year, and comments she receives from trustees). Trustee Allen stated that was not his question and asked again by what date the Board would have to act if it decided not to extend the contract. The Chair stated that it would have to be before December 31, and because the Board meets in November, it would have to be by the November Board meeting; she said she might need help from legal.

Trustee Allen asked whether that date was already in the contract. The Chair asked whether he meant the current contract; Trustee Allen said no, the one the Board was being asked to approve. The Chair stated that it was not completed because they wanted to get this finished, but that it will be clear that it would have to be by the November Board meeting because the contract is effective January 1 each year. Trustee Allen asked if that was what had been negotiated with Dr. Noland. The Chair stated they had not talked about that specifically, but that would be the way it would have to be.

Trustee Allen stated that the reason he was asking is that AGB advises against automatic renewals, and states that if a board does want an evergreen provision, it should be sure the terms are spelled out, because AGB's concern is that it is easy to miss the date by which the board must act if it does not want the contract to renew automatically. The Chair stated that she did not disagree and that it could be put in the contract, and turned to Dr. Noland. Dr. Noland stated that he would do whatever is the will of the Board, and that if the Board would like to look at the contract every November, he is comfortable with that.

Trustee Allen asked whether the motion could be amended so that the Board would take action each November to extend the contract for an additional year, rather than it extending automatically, and said he would be a whole lot more comfortable with that because the Board would be involved. The Chair stated that it could be. Trustee Allen then moved to amend the motion accordingly. The Chair stated that a motion and a second were required and asked for a second. Trustee Frye-Clark asked to speak; the Chair stated that a second was needed before discussion. The motion was not seconded, and the Chair declared that the amendment failed.

Trustee Allen stated that, that being the case, he would have to vote against the motion to approve a new contract for the President. He said he did not think the contract should automatically renew, that AGB agrees with that position, and that there are no schools in the country that do that. He reiterated that his vote is no reflection on Dr. Noland.

Trustee Frye-Clark stated: "I just went to the AGB website and what it says is that AGB guidance suggests starting with a traditional defined term contract to mutually evaluate fit before transitioning to an evergreen structure. But for proven leaders, evergreen arrangements with built-in notice and transition provisions signals a commitment to decade plus leadership, helping combat shortening presidential tenures. AGB stresses that any rolling or long-term contract must align with rigorous forward-looking presidential evaluations rather than automatic rewards, which I believe is what we are looking at now. So, AGB does not say that."

Trustee Allen responded: "Actually, what it says is you can use the AI and ask the question because I don't want to act like I'm giving incorrect information. It says AGB also advises that terms longer than 5 years are inadvisable because circumstances can change and both institution [and] president may end up locked into an expensive agreement. In guidance on presidential compensation AGB notes that presidential contracts typically extend 3 to five years."

Trustees Ayers, Summers, and Grisham followed these comments with statements expressing support for the original motion and second, as well as for President Noland's leadership and integrity. Trustee Smith stated that he agreed with Trustee Allen that the Board should be able to evaluate performance and provide input. However, he did not believe the proposed contract would prevent the Board from doing so or from taking action if necessary. Trustee Smith further noted that the Board would retain the authority to intervene and take appropriate action if Dr. Noland were not adequately performing his duties.

Chair Steagall-Jones then called the question and moved for a vote. The motion carried by voice vote, with Trustee Allen voting no. The Chair directed that the record show that Trustee Allen voted no.

IX. Selection of Board Vice Chair

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that with the expiration of Trustee Steve DeCarlo's term on the board, a vacancy exists for Vice Chair. She then made a motion to nominate Trustee Janet Ayers to fill the unexpired term as Vice Chair. Trustee Grisham seconded the motion. It passed by voice vote.

X. Selection of Executive Committee Member

Chair Steagall-Jones said that with the selection of Trustee Ayers as Vice Chair, a vacancy opens up for the board's at-large member of the Executive Committee. She then made a motion to nominate Trustee Ron Ramsey to fill the unexpired term as at-large member of the Executive Committee. Trustee Ayers seconded the motion. It passed by voice vote.

XI. Finance and Administration Committee Appointments

Chair Steagall-Jones explained that with the expiration of Trustee DeCarlo's term, there are vacancies for Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee and for a member of the committee. She made a motion to nominate Trustee Charles Allen to fill the unexpired term as Chair and Trustee Dr. Bert Smith to fill the spot on the committee. Trustee Treadway seconded the motion. It passed by voice vote.

XII. Student Support Initiatives for Military Affiliated Students

Col. Dan Bishop, Director of Military and Veteran Services, reported significant growth in ETSU's military-affiliated student population, increasing from 750 students in 2021-22 to 1,336 this year, a 78 percent increase. The university has already exceeded its 2027 goals for participation in the tuition assistance match program, with 52 students enrolled, and for National Guard/Reserve student enrollment, which now stands at 92 students. He also highlighted the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program, a partnership with the VA that will bring on-campus support for benefits enrollment and suicide prevention beginning this spring at no cost to ETSU.

Col. Bishop reviewed several engagement and outreach initiatives, including his service on Governor Bill Lee's Tri-Stars and Stripes Governors Council. Governor Lee has also appointed Col. Bishop to chair the Veterans Education Subcommittee. Additional efforts include strengthening recruitment and partnerships with community colleges, particularly Northeast State Community College; improving transfer credit evaluations to maximize credit awarded to military-affiliated students; and expanding access through a military and veteran athletic ticket program that allows veterans and active-duty service members to attend ETSU athletic events free of charge as part of America's 250th birthday celebration.

Looking ahead, Col. Bishop expressed his desire to make the tuition assistance match program a permanent benefit and extend it to graduate students. He also reported on a $5 million fundraising effort to renovate Memorial Hall and create Tennessee's largest military student support center by consolidating military-related services and organizations under one roof. President Noland commended Col. Bishop's leadership and announced that ETSU recently received the VETS Bravo designation, the highest recognition Tennessee awards to veterans-serving organizations.

XIII. Federal and State Aid Policy Update

Dr. Joe Sherlin, Senior Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment, and Dr. Heather Levesque, Associate Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment and Executive Director of Admissions, provided an update on recently enacted federal financial aid changes. Dr. Levesque outlined several impacts of the legislation, including revised enrollment requirements that may reduce student loan eligibility, changes to Pell Grant calculations, new limits on Parent PLUS Loans, and the elimination of Grad PLUS Loans for new borrowers. She commended ETSU's Financial Aid staff for helping students navigate the changes and noted that the university has implemented extensive communication efforts, including a dedicated website, direct outreach, social media messaging, and registration alerts.

Dr. Sherlin discussed growing concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship (TELS) program, noting that lottery revenues are declining while program expenditures continue to increase. Currently, 82 percent of ETSU's freshman class receives lottery scholarship support, making the program a significant source of financial assistance for students.

Dr. Sherlin reported that more than 169,000 students statewide received TELS awards last year, with increasing renewal and graduation retention rates contributing to higher costs. He noted that state leaders are exploring options to increase revenues, but absent additional funding, program changes may be necessary. President Noland added that the future of the lottery scholarship program will likely become a significant policy discussion before the Tennessee General Assembly and the next governor.

XIV. Strategic Agenda Update and KPIs

Dr. Michael Hoff, Vice Provost for Planning and Decision Support, provided an update on ETSU's strategic performance indicators and progress toward the university's long-term goals. He reported that freshman applications exceeded expectations at 12,489, total enrollment reached 14,506, and military-affiliated enrollment surpassed the university's 2030 goal at 1,336 students. He also noted that retention reached a record 78.4 percent, while post-graduation outcomes improved to 84.9 percent.

Dr. Hoff highlighted continued institutional strength in research and philanthropy, with sponsored program funding totaling $64.8 million and philanthropic giving reaching $34.2 million. He also reported improvements in the university's operational environment, including reduced staff turnover and a strong Composite Financial Index of 4.58.

Dr. Hoff indicated that enrollment projections remain on target, with next fall's enrollment projected at 14,662. He also reported completion of several strategic initiatives, including the student support center, dedicated marching band space, expanded presence in downtown Kingsport, and development of pre-college academies

through the GEAR UP grant. Future planning efforts will include updates to Strategic Agenda 2036 and the launch of planning activities for ETSU's 125th anniversary.

XV. President's Report

President Noland opened his remarks by reaffirming ETSU's longstanding mission of improving quality of life in the region and highlighting the vital role that regional public universities play in serving their communities. He noted that ETSU enrolled a record 2,288 first-time freshmen in Fall 2026, with undergraduate enrollment increasing overall. The Quillen College of Medicine and Gatton College of Pharmacy both reached record enrollment levels, while the university continues to serve more Tennessee residents than at any point during his presidency.

Dr. Noland highlighted significant gains in student engagement across campus. Participation in Welcome Week, Preview events, recreation programs, advising, academic support services, and career development activities has increased substantially in recent years. He also noted growing usage of Bucky's Closet and other student support resources, reflecting the university's efforts to meet students' needs both inside and outside the classroom.

Student success indicators continue to trend in a positive direction. Dr. Noland reported that ETSU achieved the highest retention rate in its history at 78.4 percent and remains on track toward the Board's goal of reaching an 85 percent retention rate. He emphasized that early student engagement and expanded support services are contributing to these outcomes.

Turning to finances, Dr. Noland reported that the university maintains a balanced budget with healthy reserves. Since 2022, ETSU has invested more than $26.5 million in salary enhancements. He also discussed challenges associated with Tennessee's Outcomes Funding Formula and emphasized the need to identify efficiencies that could support additional compensation increases for employees.

Dr. Noland provided updates on major capital projects and academic growth initiatives. Construction is expected to begin in 2027 on the Integrated Health Sciences Building and the Student Life Village, while renovations of Brown Hall continue. He also discussed plans for housing expansion and future academic program proposals in fields such as engineering, healthcare informatics, construction management, and neuroscience, all aimed at supporting enrollment growth and workforce needs.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Noland thanked the Board for its reaffirmation of confidence in his leadership, sharing that he and Mrs. Noland spent considerable time this summer reflecting on their future and concluded that they want to remain at East Tennessee State University. He stated that ETSU is as strong as any university in Tennessee, pointing to the institution's success in national prestigious awards as evidence. He also highlighted ETSU's broader impact through the Quillen College of Medicine, research and sponsored

programs totaling $64.8 million, support for first-generation students through TRIO programs, veterans initiatives, and community partnerships, reaffirming his commitment to the university's mission and future growth.

Dr. Noland concluded his presentation by sharing a video highlighting the story of Kamara Pennington, whose childhood experience as a patient at Niswonger Children's Hospital inspired her to pursue a degree in biomedical health sciences at ETSU. Following the presentation, Trustee Allen commended the work of Bucky's Closet and encouraged fellow board members to support the initiative through donations of professional and everyday clothing for students in need.

XVI. Action Item: Resolution of Appreciation for Trustee Steve DeCarlo

President Noland presented this resolution and called the board's attention to the full text of the document, which is in the agenda materials. Dr. Noland noted that Trustee DeCarlo was one of the original members of the Board of Trustees, chosen by Governor Bill Haslam for his business and leadership acumen, and that he has had an enormous impact on the board. Chair Steagall-Jones added that Trustee DeCarlo brought a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to the board and that his impact on the board will last forever.

Trustee Grisham made a motion that the resolution be adopted, and Trustee Ayers seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion by voice vote.

XVII. Action Item: Resolution of Appreciation for Jessica Vodden

President Noland presented this resolution and called the board's attention to the full text of the document, which is in the agenda materials. He told the board that Ms. Vodden is an alumna of Marshall University, where she participated in the equivalent of ETSU's Roan Scholars Leadership Program. He said that as Vice President of Marketing and Communications at ETSU, she transformed the way we market the institution. Ms. Vodden recently accepted a similar position at the University of Louisville.

Trustee Lundberg made a motion that the resolution be adopted, and Trustee Tony Treadway seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion by voice vote.

XVIII. Other Business

There was no other business to come before the board.

XIX. Executive Session

There was no need for an executive session.

XX. Adjournment

Chair Steagall-Jones asked Governor Ramsey to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Adam Green
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its November 6, 2026 meeting.