

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

February 20, 2026
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, February 20, 2026, at 1:04 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 1:04 p.m. She began by highlighting some of the university's recent successes and achievements. Among them:

- ETSU's recent earning of the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification, a designation held by fewer than 300 institutions nationwide. Since the Community-Engaged Learning initiative began in the fall of 2023, more than 4,000 students have enrolled in hands-on experiences tied to real community needs. Students in these courses show an 85 percent retention rate.
- Achievement of a 97.2 percent first attempt pass rate by the Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy Class of 2025 on the NAPLEX examination, placing them among the top five accredited pharmacy schools in the nation. They also ranked fourth in the country on the Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination, the highest results in Tennessee.

Chair Steagall-Jones expressed thanks to Tennessee Governor Bill Lee and members of the Tennessee General Assembly for their continued investment in ETSU's future. The governor's proposed budget includes \$19.2 million for critical utility infrastructure, \$7 million for capital maintenance, and \$2.5 million for upgrades at the ETSU/Eastman Valleybrook location.

Chair Steagall-Jones encouraged Board of Trustees members to save the date of Tuesday, March 10, for the Mary B. Martin School of the Arts Showcase at the Martin Center. The showcase will feature student performances and presentations across music, theatre, dance, visual art, film, storytelling, and bluegrass and roots music.

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 Steve DeCarlo
Trustee Wade Farmer
Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark
Trustee Jon Lundberg
Trustee Ron Ramsey
Trustee Tony Treadway
Trustee Aashi Vora

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 November 14, 2025

The minutes from the November 14, 2025, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Ron Ramsey making the motion to approve and Trustee Jon Lundberg seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Trustee Janet Ayers reported that her committee's morning agenda consisted of five information items consisting of the Academic Notification actions from August 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, an executive summary of the annual institutional review for Graduate Medical Education, a presentation by Mr. Mike Meit, Director of the Center for Rural Health and Research, on the Center, a report given by Dr. Dena Evans, Dean of the ETSU College of Nursing, and a presentation given by Ms. Kari Albarado, Director of Campus Recreation.

VI. Report from the Finance and Administration Committee

Trustee Steve DeCarlo reported that his committee approved the university's request that College of Medicine tuition remain unchanged for the 2026-27 academic year. The committee also approved housing and meal plan rates for 2026-27. Housing at ETSU, he said, continues to operate at full occupancy and remains competitively priced among Tennessee's public universities. The modest meal plan adjustment is largely driven by projected increases in food costs by Sodexo. Even with the proposed adjustment, ETSU continues to offer one of the lowest-cost meal plans in the state.

As an information item, the Finance and Administration Committee reviewed quarterly financial reports comparing December 31, 2024, to December 31, 2025. Charman DeCarlo reported that the university's financial position remains strong.

Chairman DeCarlo told the board that his committee reviewed tuition and mandatory fee considerations for FY27. ETSU remains below the state average in tuition and just below the combined tuition and mandatory fee average among Tennessee's public universities. Chairman DeCarlo said his committee then reviewed the quarterly report of agreements of \$250,000 or greater.

VII. Report from the Audit Committee

Committee Chair Ron Ramsey reported that the Audit Committee approved an Audit Plan revision to include an advisory services engagement. The committee then heard a staff report on the completion of two audits and one investigation, and a report on the status of the Audit Recommendation Log, indicating completion of one follow-up.

Chairman Ramsey said the committee then heard a report from Mr. Jeff Blanton, Associate Vice President in the Office of Administration, on campus public safety and the Clery Act. The campus crime rate remains extremely low.

Ms. Christy Graham, Chief Financial Officer, presented to the committee the Audited Financial Statement recently issued by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury. For the second year in a row, the report included no audit findings.

Chairman Ramsey indicated that the committee then went into executive session to discuss active audits, enterprise risk management, and to review university risk and unrelated internal controls. No deliberations occurred, and no action was taken.

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. There were none. Trustee Lundberg moved that the Consent Agenda be approved, and Trustee Treadway seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

IX. Martin Center Update

Ms. Jennifer Clements, Executive Director of the Martin Center and University Events, gave a comprehensive report on the progress of the Martin Center. Ms. Clements provided a brief history of the center and then recounted some of its recent successes:

- Ninety-one trained volunteers who contribute over 3,000 hours of service annually

- Full accessibility, including listening devices, sign language interpretation, sensory accommodations, family restrooms, and shuttle access
- Hosting Broadway productions, national touring acts, ballet companies, dance competitions, children’s programming, authors, comedians, conferences, and more
- Over 1,000 events hosted since fall 2021; 332 ticketed events; nearly 165,000 tickets issued; and almost \$8 million in revenue
- Fifty-six events in the ETSU Martin Center Series, ranging from ZZ Top to Sesame Street, with four seasons of Broadway productions totaling 29 Broadway shows and 49 performances
- A total of 320 events in the center during the 2024-25 season, with the building being in use for 353 days of the year, yielding \$2 million in ticket revenue
- Generation of 6.6 million impressions through the center’s marketing program, reaching 1.7 million people, with more than 137,000 visits to the center’s website
- Three hundred eighty-three unique donors to the center, with 171 being first-time university donors
- Two legacy gifts totaling almost \$400,000
- One hundred forty-nine members in the center’s Friends program for 2025

Ms. Clements described the center’s Ticket Subsidy Program, which began in 2024 as a way to remove barriers to access to the arts for children and families. Thus far, she said, through the generosity of 140 donors, more than 1,000 children have been given access to the arts.

Ms. Clements told the board that for the first time, measurable economic impact data are available, thanks to the assistance of the ETSU College of Business and Technology. Total overall impact of the center for 2024 was \$1.6 million in regional labor income, \$8 million in total economic impact output, and 58 full-time-equivalent jobs.

Ms. Clements said the center is clearly fulfilling its mission of enriching the lives of the people in our region through world-class cultural experiences. She said future plans include advocacy committee development; regional collaboration with arts nonprofits; development of a ticket subsidy endowment; an operations endowment and capital funding strategy; expansion of development opportunities; and continued expansion of programming.

X. President’s Report

Building on Ms. Clements’ presentation, Dr. Noland began by thanking Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark for their leadership in the Martin School for the Arts, which is bringing together the community and the campus to provide a home for the arts. He said the Martin Center is a testament to the power of philanthropy and the impact that donors have on the future of the region. He paid tribute to the legacies of Mr. Jim Martin, Mr.

Jim Powell, and Dr. Bert Bach, whose impact on ETSU is felt every day through the Martin Center's work.

President Noland framed his report within the founding institutional mission of improving the quality of life for the people of the region and beyond, as first articulated by President Sidney G. Gilbreath in 1911. He then reviewed the university's current strategic plan and the pillars: access and success; excellence in teaching; research and innovation; community stewardship; employee empowerment; and operational sustainability.

Beginning with access and success, Dr. Noland called the board's attention to data from EAB that projected enrollment trends nationwide immediately after the COVID Pandemic. The EAB forecast was that large national universities would grow in enrollment, and private, elite institutions would grow in enrollment. However, large regional universities and regional universities like ETSU were projected to face enrollment struggles. A 2026 EAB analysis of the shifting enrollment landscape indicates that of the more than 2,200 universities across the country, 175 gained market share between 2010 and 2023. Those were the online giants, Ivy Plus, large selective private institutions, large urban publics, and state flagships. Dr. Noland said that most institutions like ETSU fall somewhere in the middle, because in many cases, they do not have a niche that differentiates them. ETSU, however, does have a niche, which is to improve the quality of life for the people of the region and beyond. That difference, Dr. Noland said, is leading to ETSU's growth in enrollment. He pointed out that spring 2026 enrollment stands at 13,416, which is a peak. Undergraduate enrollment, at 10,345, is up by 336 students.

Dr. Noland said these figures show that fall enrollment growth is carrying forward into spring. Retention rates, he said, are moving in a positive direction, with 91 percent of all freshmen who start in the fall returning in the spring, which is one of the highest fall-to-spring retention rates in ETSU's history. Mapping that through all the other classes, it is clear that fall-to-fall retention rates will continue to make progress toward the overall 85 percent goal established by the Board of Trustees. Dr. Noland predicted that freshman numbers for the fall of 2026 will be equally strong, with applications up slightly compared to this time last year.

Dr. Noland reminded the board of the significance of the university's new Federally funded Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant, which is one of the largest grants in the history of the university. He said it will allow us to place embedded staff in middle schools and high schools across the region, with a focus on creating a college-going culture in Northeast Tennessee. Some 5,000 students across six school districts will be impacted by this P-20 work. Dr. Noland described GEAR UP as "the mission of the university brought to life."

Turning to operational sustainability, President Noland indicated that the upcoming fiscal year will be a tight budget period across the board in Tennessee. Spending in Governor

Bill Lee's FY27 recommendation from all revenue sources is 10 percent (or \$6.1 billion) lower than FY26 estimates. Spending from state revenues is 0.4 percent (or \$125 million) lower. Figures indicate that the state's main rainy day reserve would total \$2.2 billion in FY27, which would cover about 31 days of General Fund operations. The total recommendation for state revenues across all aspects of the budget is down by some \$29 billion year over year, but the expenditure element of that is as it has always been: Education, health, and social services take up about 67 cents on the dollar of every dollar the state spends. Dr. Noland noted that an area showing significant growth is lottery expenditures. Growth in expenditures in lottery funds has occurred, he said, because of increases in programs like the HOPE Scholarship and dual enrollment programs, while lottery proceeds have dropped. Lottery-funded scholarship costs have now begun to exceed net lottery proceeds. Dr. Noland said that in the near future, particular attention should be paid to lottery revenue and expenditures and to any potential changes in lottery scholarships.

President Noland expressed thanks to Governor Bill Lee and the members of the Tennessee General Assembly for investments made in capital. He indicated that during Governor Lee's administration, investments in capital for higher education have been unprecedented. He pointed to ETSU's soon-to-be-completed Academic Building, Brown Hall, Lamb Hall, and the future groundbreaking for the Integrated Health Sciences Building as examples. Dr. Noland expressed further gratitude for the \$19.2 million to support utility infrastructure upgrades and improvements on ETSU's main campus, calling it a "novel investment by the state." Dr. Noland also expressed appreciation for the \$7 million included in Governor Lee's budget for deferred maintenance, bringing the amount to be invested in new capital for the campus infrastructure to more than \$26 million.

Dr. Noland then reviewed ETSU's legislative agenda for this session of the General Assembly:

- Support full funding of the THEC appropriations recommendation for the outcomes formula, salary enhancements, and deferred maintenance
- Support the THEC recommendation for TSAA funding and other state-supported financial aid programs
- Support the THEC recommendation for the Gatton College of Pharmacy and the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health
- Support for capital project funding and predictability in the selection process

Dr. Noland acknowledged the work of Gatton College of Pharmacy Dean Dr. Debbie Byrd and her colleagues for their belief in the mission of the college. Dr. Noland said the \$2.5 million allocated to the Gatton College of Pharmacy, and strongly advocated by then Senator Lundberg several years ago, was predicated on lowering tuition and fees to a rate equal to the University of Tennessee, recruiting more students from Tennessee, and ensuring that our students are successful. All of these, he said, have been accomplished.

He underscored the success of the Gatton College of Pharmacy class of 2025 in achieving a 97.2 percent first attempt pass rate on the NAPLEX examination, placing them fifth in the nation, second in the South, and number one in Tennessee. Further, President Noland noted, the average debt load of every student at Gatton has been reduced by \$40,000.

Dr. Noland gave the board a summary of upgrades occurring across technology platforms at ETSU. He presented a high-level overview of Voyager implementation, noting that we have developed, tested, and deployed the new system and that the refinement process is now underway. He said the system is working but is undergoing enhancements. This spring, he announced, ETSU will begin moving to a new platform for students, remaining in Banner but advancing to a Cloud-based system. ETSU will update and upgrade the Ellucian platform that undergirds the entire enterprise resource planning system for students. In addition, Dr. Noland announced that ETSU will be completely redesigning its web architecture. The three-year overhaul is being led by the Office of University Marketing and Communication.

Dr. Noland then provided an update on the Board of Trustees' fall 2025 authorization to create a \$1.5 million salary pool and to distribute that money this spring. Over the next couple of months, Dr. Noland said, the administration will be working with faculty and staff to finalize the distribution methodology and then push those resources out into the campus. Between 2022 and 2026, he said, ETSU, with the authorization of the Board of Trustees, has invested more than \$25 million in faculty and staff salaries. More work is yet to come, he added.

Dr. Noland reviewed the university's strategic initiatives for the year: a heavy focus on adult degree completion and online education; intrusive advising and other services offered through the Mary V. Jordan Student Success Center; expansion of the academic portfolio with engineering and hospitality and tourism; P-20 and rural education enhancements, including the GEAR UP grant and work being done in principal leadership; and Outdoor Adventure programming. President Noland added that 500 first-year students will participate in Outdoor Adventure activities.

Dr. Noland told the board that in addition to being included on the Great Colleges to Work For Honor Roll for 2025, ETSU has been recognized by *Forbes* as the number 71 midsized employer in the nation.

This year, Dr. Noland said, the university's strategic plan for research will be completed, under the leadership of Dr. Saurabh Mehta and Dr. Pam Mims. That plan, which will be presented to the Board of Trustees for review in 2026, will deal with growth in research infrastructure and how research at ETSU impacts the region. Within the Strategic Plan as outlined in ETSU 125, Chapter II, Dr. Noland reported that we continue to address budget model optimization; Voyager; implementation of the new classification and compensation system for all employees; academic portfolio analysis; the strategic enrollment plan; research administration; and transformation of campus housing.

President Noland concluded his presentation by highlighting upcoming events, including a new one, the Mountain Made Appalachian Folk Festival, which will take place April 7. He thanked ETSU's student leaders for making this day possible to celebrate Appalachian culture.

XI. Other Business

There was no other business to come before the board.

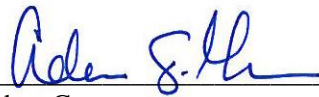
XII. Executive Session

There was no need for an executive session.

XIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Green", is written over a horizontal line.

Adam Green
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its May 21, 2026 meeting.