

Staff Advisory Committee
January 15, 2026 – 1:30 p.m.

Members Present: Joyce Arnold-Hesson, Brian Allen, Danny Birdwell, Christa Blair, Jennifer Dewar, Emily Disbrow, Ashton Estes, Jennifer Goad, Liam Harder, Melanie Mabrey, Tammy Martorana, Irene Mauk, Peggy Nettenstrom, Cathleen Walker, Catherine Warren, Savannah Yarbrough

Members Absent: Jennifer Dewar, Miranda Wilson

Others Present: President Oldham, Lee Wray, Aleta Cannon

Summary:

Approved Agenda

Approved October 30, 2025 minutes

Discussed Staff Day planning updates

Comments by the President

Proceedings:

Chair Melanie Mabrey called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. Catherine Warren motioned to approve the agenda for January 15, 2026. Deborah Yu seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Peggy Nettenstrom motioned to approve the October 30, 2025, minutes. Ashton Estes seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Mabrey explained that a group had met on December 5, 2025 to begin planning Staff Day 2026. The group had discussed likes and dislikes from the previous year's event, and some ideas were to continue with free t-shirts or potentially long sleeve shirts, giveaways, and filling a University Police vehicle with food pantry donations, which had been approved by UPD.

President Oldham began his comments by discussing Capital Projects updates. The Randall and Majorie Warden Agriculture and Innovation Center held its grand opening before the holidays at Shipley Farm. There had been a special called Board of Trustees meeting on January 9, 2026, to approve the donor-funded, \$2 million project for the "Tech Tower" so it could be presented before the State Building Commission. There had been quite a bit of publicity on the project already. The Derryberry Hall auditorium renovations were scheduled to be completed in February 2026. Requests for proposals had been sent out for the new tennis complex and student spirits commons project. The Tucker Stadium project was scheduled to be completed in time for the first home game on August 29, 2026.

Oldham stated that a new master's program in industrial and systems engineering, a Bachelor of Science in artificial intelligence program, and a PhD in biology had been approved. Tennessee Tech was ranked #1 in the state for the online nurse practitioner program and Dr. Rory Roberts in the College of Engineering had been named the inaugural Jon Yarbrough Endowed Professor. Legislature would be back in session soon and there would be a better idea of the fiscal year 2027 budget at that time. The University would be seeking funding for new construction of the life and social sciences buildings, and some additional funding to launch the new artificial intelligence program and equipment for nuclear engineering.

There had been an influx of students from the northeast and Midwest to enroll in southern schools due to lower tuition, warmer weather, and other factors. Tennessee Tech was learning how to strategize for these students. Marketing and athletics efforts had led to a substantial amount of press for the University, and this would be used to campus's benefit. Research rankings continued to rise, and Tennessee Tech had increased nearly fifty spots on the National Science Foundation rankings. Oldham showed a video compilation of recent news coverage for Tennessee Tech.

Liam Harder asked about the timeline for the parking garage. Oldham answered that it would need to go through an approval process because it would require a mandatory fee for students, which required state approval. His rough estimate was around two years. Mabrey asked if faculty and staff fees would increase due to the parking garage construction. Oldham answered that the financials were not fully mapped out, but student parking costs would likely increase.

Jennifer Goad asked if the parking garage would be primarily for faculty and staff or if it would be evenly split between students and staff. Oldham answered that designations for the garage had not been decided on yet. Tammy Martorana asked if anything had been done to make the parking on the other side of Willow Avenue more attractive to students. Oldham explained that he was open to suggestions, and that shuttle stops at the lot were intended to be helpful for students parking in that lot. It was possible to review the shuttle schedule to look for improvements. Harder asked if it was possible to sell day passes to the Willow Avenue lot for commuter students. Ashton Estes asked if there was someone to speak with regarding adding a shuttle stop at Hyder Burks and the new Randall and Marjorie Warden Agriculture Innovation Center. Lee Wray answered that Nick Dolata, director of Auxiliaries, would be the best person to speak with.

Martorana asked when Johnson Hall renovations would be completed. Oldham answered that the estimated completion date was in the spring of 2028. Deborah Yu replied that Dean Payne was recently told there was a tentative completion date of fall 2027.

There were no other such matters.

Christa Blair motioned to adjourn. Harder seconded. Adjourned at 2:10 pm.

Aleta Cannon, recorder

Documents on file:

Agenda, January 15, 2026
Minutes, October 30, 2025